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Daughter of Former Auto Mechanic Files Lawsuit, Cites Nearly 40 Years of Benzene Exposure

NEW ORLEANS — The daughter of a former auto mechanic has filed a lawsuit in Louisiana federal court against a number of Shell defendants, contending that her father's death nearly eight years ago was a result of benzene exposure.

In the June 13 lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, the plaintiff contends that her father developed myelodysplastic syndrome as a result of the exposure.

Elise Leslie filed the claims on behalf of her deceased father, Bruce W. Leslie, contending that his work at Automotive Service in New Orleans for nearly 40 years exposed him to benzene-containing products.

The plaintiff specifically asserts that Leslie performed "various mechanic tasks," that required him to clean, repair and maintain automobiles with products manufactured by defendants Shell Oil and Shell Chemical.

"From 1946 through 1985, Mr. Leslie would regularly use or come into contact with pure benzene or benzene-containing products including gasoline, diesel and other solvents," the lawsuit says. "Mr. Leslie used pure benzene, gasoline and other solvents to perform various tasks on a daily basis throughout his career from 1946 through 1985 while working at Automotive Service in New Orleans. In 2005, Mr. Leslie was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome. His myelodysplastic syndrome was caused by his exposure to benzene and benzene-containing products."

The plaintiff says in the complaint that groups in the petroleum refining and manufacturing field have recognized benzene as a health hazard for more than 100 years.

"Through industry and medical studies unknown to plaintiffs, the Defendants knew or should have known of the health hazards inherent in the products they manufactured, distributed, sold, supplied, owned, transported, or used," the complaint says.

The complaint asserts causes of action for strict product liability and invokes the discovery rule, saying that the plaintiffs were not made aware of the cause of Leslie's injuries until eight years after his death.

Counsel for the plaintiff are L. Eric Williams Jr. of the Williams Law Office in Metairie, La.; and Richard J. Fernandez and Amber Cisney of Richard J. Fernandez LLC in Metairie, La.

Leslie, et al. v. Shell Chemical LP, et al., No. 13-04791 (E.D. La.).

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HarrisMartin Publishing - 30 Washington Avenue, Suite D-3, Haddonfield, NJ 08033
(610) 647-5500 - www.harrismartin.com - service@harrismartin.com