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Family of N.J. man blown through roof of building files wrongful death suit

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A Harrison Township police car sits in the front yard of Timberlane Services on June 15, 2022, following the fatal workplace accident. Dave Hernandez | For NJ Advance

The family of a man killed in an explosion that blew him through the roof of a Gloucester County business as he performed welding work on an oil truck has filed a lawsuit against his employer and others.

Bruce A. Cheeseman, 48, of Cedarville, was working at Timberlane Services Inc., which performs truck and trailer repairs, in Harrison Township on June 15, 2022, when the incident occurred.

He was welding parts to the top of a fuel tank truck inside the

facility when the tank exploded, “blowing the employee through the building roof and a considerable vertical distance above the building itself,” according to a report by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

OSHA levied more than \$38,000 in fines against Timberlane last year over the incident, finding willful violations of safety precautions regarding welding, failures to notify employees about hazardous chemicals in the workplace and the absence of a workplace hazard communication program.

The truck Cheeseman was working on had not been adequately cleaned to remove fuel and vapor from the tank before welding began, the report stated.

Timberlane contested the findings and the total penalty was reduced to \$20,000 under a settlement agreement between federal regulators and the business. As part of that settlement, the willful violation of welding precautions was amended to a “serious” violation, [according to details included online by OSHA](#).

An administrative law judge signed off on the agreement in March and Timberlane has addressed the issues cited, an OSHA spokeswoman confirmed. Once the penalty is paid, the case will be closed, the spokeswoman said.

Timberlane representatives did not respond to a request for comment about the OSHA fines or the lawsuit.

The Superior Court lawsuit filed last month by Cheeseman’s estate accuses Timberlane and others of failing to take appropriate safety precautions prior to the explosion.

In addition to Timberlane and its owner, the suit names Taylor Oil

Company Inc., owner of the truck, as a defendant, along with an unnamed Philadelphia-based garage that was allegedly supposed to empty the fuel tank prior to the vehicle being taken to Timberlane.

The oil company did not respond to a request for comment about the litigation.

The suit described multiple injuries Cheeseman suffered in the blast, which left his body 25 to 30 feet from where he had been working.

“Mr. Cheeseman sustained multiple catastrophic injuries to his head and neck, torso, and extremities resulting from the explosion, and was pronounced dead on the scene of the incident,” the lawsuit states.

The family accuses the defendants of negligence and wrongful death for failing to take safety precautions and failing to properly train and supervise employees. Timberlane is also accused of “intentional disregard” of a known safety hazard regarding welding near flammable substances.

“Defendant Timberlane’s actions, which caused Mr. Cheeseman’s death, are not a simple fact of industrial life and are outside the purview of the conditions that the New Jersey Legislature intended to immunize under the Worker’s Compensation bar,” the suit states.

The lawsuit also contains a product liability claim against the manufacturers and distributors of the welding equipment Cheeseman was using, alleging the product was designed in a defective manner.

The plaintiffs seek a jury trial and an unspecified dollar figure in damages, including coverage of medical bills and income Cheeseman would have earned had he lived to his natural life expectancy.

Cheeseman had worked at Timberlane for 20 years, [according to his obituary](#).



A South Jersey Gas employee tests the ground in front of Timberlane Services in Harrison Township on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, following a fatal workplace explosion. Dave Hernandez | For NJ Advance

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Matt Gray may be reached at mgray@njadvancemedia.com.

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