

### **3d Family Sues Trucker, Others in Fatal Crash**

The family of a New Jersey woman, one of three people killed in September in the fiery crash on the Schuylkill Expressway, filed suit yesterday against the driver of a tractor-trailer they say caused the accident, the food company for which he was hauling, and the company that owned the vehicle.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia, is the third by relatives of those who died.

The New Jersey woman and two men died shortly after midnight Sept. 25 when the tractor-trailer, carrying 18,000 pounds of soy products, struck a pickup. The pickup caught fire and was forced into the New Jersey woman's vehicle which burst into flames. The tractor-trailer driver escaped, but the others were trapped. Thirteen vehicles were involved and 11 people injured.

The accident occurred in the westbound lanes of the highway, near the area known as the Conshohocken curve. No charges have been filed by the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, which continues to investigate the case.

Louis Podel, the lawyer handling the case, said yesterday that he had seen results of blood tests done on the tractor-trailer driver and was seeking his medical files to determine whether he could have taken medication that might have impaired his judgment.

"We have some witness statements that they saw the truck a couple of miles back drifting to another lane," Podel said. "When they flashed him with lights, he drifted back. My supposition from that is that if he was alerted to go back to his correct lane by someone flashing their lights, he should have realized he was drowsy."

Donald Davis, a Philadelphia lawyer representing the parties being sued, said yesterday, "There is an issue as to whether the tractor-trailer driver has an undiagnosed medical condition that may have played a part." He declined to further comment.

The investigation is time-consuming because of the medical question, said Timothy Woodward, Montgomery County first assistant district attorney.

"We are in the process of trying to consult with some physicians that treated the tractor-trailer driver since the crash," Woodward said. "We want to determine if such a condition existed and what role, if any, it might have played in the accident, and whether or not he had been treated for that condition prior to the accident. It's taking time because we're dealing with doctors, trying to get medical releases."

Investigators have said there was no indication that illegal drugs or alcohol were involved.

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By Ralph Vigoda  
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