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B-3

Man gets \$2.2 million in Union Carbide suit

From staff reports

An Ascension Parish man was recently awarded \$2.2 million by a state district judge who agreed that the man suffered permanent injuries because of a 1994 incident at Union Carbide's Taft/Star Manufacturing Complex.

Donald J. Oubre, 50, of Prairieville, filed suit in 1995 alleging that he was injured in an incident that exposed him to a highly irritating chemical — amine, a derivative of ammonia — when he was working as a contract draftsman at the Taft plant. Oubre's employer was Jacobs Engineering Inc.

In his ruling filed Feb. 19, state District Judge Ralph Tureau of the 23rd Judicial District agreed that Union Carbide failed to protect Oubre by not warning him about risks and not providing protective equipment.

A Union Carbide spokesman said Monday that the company plans to appeal, and denies that Oubre was injured in an accident

at its Taft plant.

Spokesman Stan Dufrene said the plant is dedicated to safety and has a proven record.

"Union Carbide has also continuously upgraded the tools and methodology to identify and mitigate risks as part of its overall risks management program," he said.

Oubre's suit said that on July 28, 1994, he was exposed to an irritating chemical in the plant's ethylene-amines unit, which is used in the manufacture of plastics. Oubre said the irritant burned his eyes and made him cough, and that later he became nauseated.

A Union Carbide technician allegedly reassured Oubre that he had the "amines crud" but would soon recover, his suit said.

But Oubre and medical experts testified that he never did fully recover. Months after the incident, Oubre had two operations on his sinuses, and produced experts who said he would suffer memory loss and eye and lung damage.