



Ex-smoker gets \$750k in lawsuit

BY RON WORD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — An ex-smoker who lost a lung to cancer became the first person to collect money for beating the tobacco industry in court over a smoking-related illness.

Lawyers for Grady Carter received \$1,087,191 from Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. on Thursday as full payment plus interest on a 1995 jury award of \$750,000. Carter's lung cancer is in remission.

"Brown & Williamson paid \$750,000, but I paid with a lung," the 70-year-old Carter of suburban Jacksonville said at a news conference.

The Florida Supreme Court upheld the jury's decision in November, and Wednesday it refused to allow the company to avoid paying Carter while the company pursues a new appeal.

Brown & Williamson spokesman Mark Smith said the company plans to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The 1995 judgment was the second time in 40 years of litigation that a cigarette maker was ordered to pay damages to a smoker. Until Thursday, the industry had never actually paid any money on a jury verdict.

In 1988, the family of Rose Cipollone of New Jersey was awarded \$400,000 at trial, but the judgment was overturned on appeal.

Carter blamed Brown & Williamson for the cancer he developed after smoking for 44 years. A jury ruled the cigarettes were defective and their makers were negligent for not warning people of the danger.

New Year's terrorist pleads guilty

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — An Algerian accused of helping smuggle explosives into the United States in a 1999 case that stirred fears of a terrorist attack during millennium celebrations has pleaded guilty and agreed to cooperate with the government.

Abdel Ghani Meskini, 33, entered the plea in federal court on Wednesday.

The guilty plea to conspiracy charges could carry up to 105 years in prison and fines of \$2.75 million, but prosecutors said they will argue for a lesser term and possible admission to the witness protection program if Meskini cooperates.

Meskini was arrested in New York for his alleged part in a conspiracy to sneak explosives from Canada into the country in late 1999.

Meskini was taken into custody after authorities connected him to Ahmed Ressam. Ressam, a 32-year-old Algerian, was arrested in Port Angeles, Wash., after arriving on a ferry from Canada in December 1999. He was allegedly trying to smuggle bomb-making materials into the United States.

School explosion in China kills 42

■ Parents say blast caused by teachers forcing students to assemble fireworks in class

BY JOHN LEICESTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING — It should have been just their classroom. Instead, it became their grave.

Children who died when their school exploded in southeast China were forced to make fireworks in class, their parents said Thursday. The father of an 11-year-old victim said he was among the first to arrive at the scene and saw dead children in the rubble still clutching fuses in their hands.

State media said 42 people were killed and 27 injured. Parents gave figures of between 53 and more than 60 — four of them teachers, the rest children. Many bodies were dismembered. Parts of one boy were found in a nearby river, said the father of a 9-year-old who died.

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji blamed a man with mental problems for Tuesday's explosion, which reduced the school in Fang Lin village, Jiangxi province, to a pile of bricks, books and furniture. The official Xinhua News Agency identified him as a 33-year-old fireworks maker, Li Chuicai, and said he was known in the village as "psycho."

It said police found a notebook and papers in his home containing the

confused phrase: "I'll sacrifice myself with 100 pounds of silver saltpeter, blast all, burn all, killing dozens of them at the very least."

But parents said government officials were lying. Zhang Chenggen said his 11-year-old son, who died, and other third- and fourth-graders had since 1998 been forced to assemble firecrackers in class, normally working a half-day. Profits subsidized school expenses and went to school officials, Zhang said.

The father of another 11-year-old victim said children were rushing to complete orders for China's traditional grave-sweeping festival on April 5, when families honor deceased relatives.

"Everybody knows it is caused by the fireworks," Zhang said by telephone. "The government is trying to cover the facts. Please do not believe them."

The explosion was not the first to kill children in China's fireworks industry. Last March, 17 children — the youngest aged 8 — were among 35 people killed when a fireworks factory exploded in another Jiangxi village about 30 miles from Tuesday's blast. The children earned 12 cents a day for fitting fuses to firecrackers, the state-run newspaper *Southern Weekend* reported.

In poor villages all along Jiangxi's

mountainous border with Hunan province, fireworks are a key industry. Most are put together by hand in family workshops for sale nationwide, with some officials paid to look the other way, the *Southern Weekend* said.

In Fang Lin, about 30 families make fireworks at home, including the village's Communist Party leader and some school officials and teachers, said Zhang Shushen, whose 11-year-old son was killed in Tuesday's blast.

Teachers distributed the work to students, and pupils who refused to do it or told their parents were banned from classes or made to kneel on the classroom floor, Zhang said. Children and parents had little choice — it was the village's only primary school.

The party secretary, who fled after the blast, was caught Wednesday by police and the school principal turned himself in, Zhang said. Thousands of people demonstrated Wednesday and again Thursday outside the school, demanding an investigation, he said.

"I was among the first batch of people to rush to the explosion site. I clearly saw the hands of some dead children still holding fuses," he said. "There is no doubt the fireworks they were making caused the explosion."

Funerals for the children were set for Friday, Zhang said. The government gave the family of each dead child \$3,660 for funeral expenses, said the other father, Zhang Chenggen.

Police erected roadblocks around the village and detained at least three reporters who tried to reach the area.

The disaster, which came during the 11-day annual meeting of China's national legislature, is extremely embarrassing for Chinese leaders whose reputations have suffered from a string of fatal building collapses and fires.

Premier Zhu, denying that fireworks manufacturing in the school was to blame, said the explosion was caused by a man who carried a bag of fireworks into the school. Zhu and Xinhua said the man died in the explosion.

"According to initial investigation, he suffered from mental problems, but we'll continue with the investigation," Zhu told Hong Kong television.

The state-run *Liao Shen Evening Paper* quoted a teacher as saying a man dumped a sack of explosives on a student's desk and lit the fuse.

"I shouted for the students to run, then heard a huge noise and I don't know anything else," the teacher was quoted as saying.

WORLD BRIEFS

■ Sharon willing to meet with Arafat if violence ends

JERUSALEM (AP) — On his first full day in office, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Thursday he would be willing to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for negotiations — if the current violence ends. A smiling, relaxed Sharon stood shoulder-to-shoulder with outgoing premier Ehud Barak at a brief ceremony marking the handover of power a month after Sharon won a landslide election victory.

■ Labor group says women still facing a 'glass ceiling'

GENEVA (AP) — Women are making up an increasing percentage of the world's workers, but many still find it impossible to break into top jobs, the International Labor Organization said Thursday. In a report to mark International Women's Day, the organization said women, who make up around 40 percent of the global work force, face a "glass ceiling" when they try to get to the top in business and politics.



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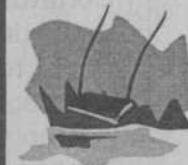
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