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Two miners win \$800,000 suit against air compressor maker

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A Tuscaloosa County jury has ordered a West Virginia company pay \$800,000 in damages after finding the company sold a defective air compressor that burned two Brookwood mine workers.

The products liability case against A.L. Lee Corp. was brought by Clifford Gurley, 49, of Birmingham, and Garland Morris, 54, of Vance. The men were working several miles below ground at the Jim Walter Resources No. 7 mine in Brookwood April 22, 2000, when a switch on an air compressor malfunctioned and started a fire. Both escaped but suffered second- and third-degree burns to 10 percent of their bodies, including their faces, hands and legs.

A Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court jury last week awarded \$800,000 in compensatory damages, which will be split by the two men.

Plaintiffs' attorneys Jason and Gusty Yearout, of Birmingham, argued the company sold the air compressor with a defective on/off switch, and the defect caused the fire.

Defense attorney Scott Tyra of Birmingham, said Tuesday the switch was not an original component of the machine and that the machine was modified after leaving the factory in 1984. Tyra said he did not know whether the company will appeal.

Jason Yearout said Gurley, a shop supervisor, and Morris, an electrician, still work at the mine but both have permanent scarring, are now sensitive to cold and heat, and are limited to what they can do with their hands.

Gurley used to play golf weekly with his son, but his hands are so badly damaged that he can no longer grip a golf club.

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