



## Wrong-Way Driver Victim's Family Awarded \$7 Million

### Had Filed Wrongful Death Claim Against Verizon

Thursday, July 1, 2010

The family of Jose Vega — who was killed on the morning of September 23, 2009, when a Verizon employee driving the wrong way on Highway 101 slammed head-on into his minivan — was awarded \$7 million today after filing a wrongful death claim against the company.

The employee, Mark Selander, was reportedly suffering from a diabetic reaction when he got on the highway at Winchester Canyon in a company truck and drove southbound on northbound lanes for eight miles before causing the six-car accident. It took rescue crews more than an hour to extricate 49-year-old Vega from his mangled car, but he died at the scene. Selander suffered only minor injuries.



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The minivan driven by Jose Vega, a father of two and longtime landscaper for the Santa Barbara Housing Authority

The terms of the agreement were announced in Judge Eskin's courtroom as four members of Vega's teary-eyed family looked on. The \$7 million will be divvied up among five family members with Vega's widow, Reyna, receiving \$4 million and his children and grandchildren collecting either \$1 million or \$500,000 each.

The first payment of \$3.5 million, said Eskin, must be made by August 10 and the second half on or before September 10. The judge, as is protocol, also made sure the Vega family understood that the agreement reached represents the final termination of the lawsuit and that it can't file another against the company.

While the attorney representing Verizon declined to comment, the family's lawyer, Brian Panish, said he was pleased with the terms of the settlement. "We're very happy for the family," he said. "And we're glad Verizon has come to grips with its responsibility. Hopefully this will make sure something

like this doesn't happen again." Panish said in previous statements that the successful claim represents one of the largest wrongful death settlements on the record in Santa Barbara County Superior Court.

Panish said that Verizon was aware of Selander's "condition" but failed to do anything about it, and that the employee had had prior diabetic reaction incidents that were not properly addressed. And Selander, continued Panish, was sleep-deprived when the accident happened as he worked a graveyard shift. "It was a long road, but we're glad we made it," Panish said.