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Jury Awards Multi-Million Dollar Verdict

A Livingston man rendered a quadriplegic as a result of a 1996 automobile accident was awarded more than \$16 million by a Lufkin jury in what is believed to be the largest personal injury verdict in the history of Angelina County.

In all, North American Van Lines and Lufkin Moving and Storage were ordered to pay \$16.7 million to Charles Emmons and his three daughters.

Emmons, 67 at the time, was a passenger in a Ford Bronco being driven by his daughter-in-law, Stephanie Emmons. They were stopped on a two-lane stretch on U.S. 69, just south of Woodville, waiting to make a left turn into a restaurant parking lot when their vehicle was rear-ended by a North American Van Lines truck.

The three-week trial was multi-layered as NAVL and its alter ego North American Van Lines of Texas sued Ford under a crashworthiness theory claiming the sat back holding Mr. Emmons failed and that was the cause of his paralysis. NAVL contended a stiffer seat back should have been used.

However, the jury found no fault on the part of Ford saying they believed the Bronco was not defectively designed. It instead declared negligence on the part of NAVL, NATEX, Lufkin Moving and Storage, and Edwin Cartagena, the driver of the truck.

Cartagena did not possess a commercial driver's license and was legally blind in his right eye. He was employed by Lufkin Moving and Storage, an agent for North American Van Lines.

NAVL uses a wholly owned subsidiary, NATEX, as its authority to make Texas intrastate hauls. The truck was owned and operated by Lufkin Moving and Storage and leased exclusively to NAVL who claimed it was never told that an unqualified, unlicensed driver was driving. NAVL therefore claimed that it was defrauded by its agent Lufkin Moving and Storage.

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