

\$33.8 million goes to man who fell through skylight

Jury's award is double what maintenance worker sought

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FORT WORTH — In 2010, maintenance man Steven Landers was working on the roof of a Williamson-Dickie building on Blue Mound Road when he fell headfirst through an acrylic plastic skylight.

He landed 35 feet below on a concrete floor.

His broken right leg was eventually amputated; his back, some ribs and his left arm were broken; and a lung was punctured.

Landers' lawsuit against the skylight manufacturer, Wasco Products of Wells, Maine, went to trial March 23 in 48th state District Court. His attorneys asked the Tarrant County jury for a \$15 million judgment.

On Thursday, jurors awarded Landers \$33.8 million.

"I think it was a fair decision," Landers said Friday. "The jury worked hard to reach their decision."

Attorney Mark Haney said: "It is my hope that the jury spoke loud enough that Wasco heard them up in Maine: Stop making cheap, brittle skylights that kill and maim people."

Wasco's attorneys could not be reached for comment Friday.

Landers, 31, is married with four children. On Sept. 18, 2010, he was replacing a venting motor on the roof when he squatted to pick up tools, lost his balance and put his hand on the skylight to steady himself. Instead, he fell through, Haney said.

Despite the loss of his right



Because of his injuries from a 35-foot fall, Steven Landers' right leg was amputated below the knee.

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leg below the knee and a bad back, Landers returned to work after 14 months.

"Once I got my prosthetic, I could walk and came back to work," Landers said.

The skylight was made of acrylic plastic one-eighth-inch thick and would not support a 100-pound person, Haney said. Acrylic plastic one-quarter-inch thick could support more than 500 pounds, he said.

Pat Gallagher, another attorney for Landers, said, "There are millions of these one-eighth-inch-thick skylights on houses and commer-

cial buildings around the country, and the manufacturers have decided to defend the lawsuits rather than change the dangerous design.

"Just this year, there has been a rash of skylight falls because of heavy snow."

Since 1980, Wasco has been sued 15 times after someone fell through a skylight and was injured or died, he said.

Wasco President C.G. Magnuson said in video testimony shown to the jury that the company has not taken steps to address any problems with the skylights or researched wheth-

er warning signs on the skylights have been effective.

"We haven't done that," Magnuson said in the video. "We chose not to do that."

Initially, Landers sued Wasco, Anchor Roofing and Williamson-Dickie. Anchor Roofing settled out of court, and Williamson-Dickie was dropped from the suit early on.

Haney said Friday that he believes Williamson-Dickie was never aware of the potential danger.

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