

# The Detroit News

Thursday, June 24, 1999

Metro Edition

## Rouge victims offered \$20M

Ford payout could go higher to 14 injured in boiler blast and families of six killed.

By David Shepardon  
The Detroit News

DEARBORN — Ford Motor Co. has offered at least \$20 million to settle potential lawsuits from the families of the six killed and 14 badly injured victims in the Rouge complex explosion.

Company spokesman John

Spelich confirmed Wednesday that Ford had offered settlements in the Feb. 1 explosion of the complex's powerhouse, but would not discuss details.

"We care very deeply about the welfare of our employees."

Attorneys for the families said Ford has agreed to pay about \$1

million to each of the injured and the families of those killed. Based on the number of dependent children and their age, as well as the extent of their injuries, the amount for each family could be higher, the attorneys said.

The family attorneys said the total amount of the settlement could reach \$30 million.

The explosion at the 1,000-acre complex in Dearborn that's home to six Ford plants and Rouge Steel

was the costliest industrial accident in U.S. history and the deadliest automotive-factory accident in more than a half-century.

State regulators said a gas buildup in the six-story Boiler No. 6 caused the explosion that started several fires in the plant, but they are still investigating the cause of the blast. Officials have said there may have been more than one explosion.

Under the agreements, work-

ers would have to waive claims against anyone in connection with the suit, including Rouge Steel.

Three employees have filed suits against Rouge Steel, but not against Ford. The three are the family of Ken Anderson, 44, of Wyandotte, who died as a result of injuries sustained in the accident; Patrick Piskinski, 46, of Westland; and Ralph Irvin, 33, of Detroit.

Please see ROUGE, Page 8A

### The blast's toll

Six workers died of injuries as a result of the Feb. 1 explosion in Boiler No. 6 at the Ford Rouge complex and 14 were seriously injured.

Experts say it will be the most costly industrial disaster in U.S. history, with losses expected to top \$1 billion.

## Hotel market sizzles with Detroit's revival

3 casinos, other projects fuel demand for lodging

By RJ King  
The Detroit News



REBUILDING



KOSOVO



NATO forces in Kosovo, including this German soldier passing a burning Serb house, are increasingly becoming targets, like the U.S. marines attacked Wednesday.

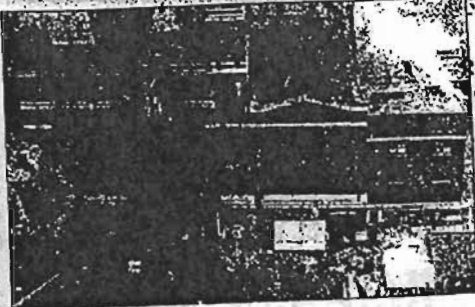
## Marines



Dale G. Young / The Detroit News  
"I'm not worried about when they can't win on

Airport operations, more bad popped up.  
"I'm not sure why he chose to," said Mike Duggan, Wayne's deputy executive director, who have sincere objectives call and sit down and try to formed. People with political ves attack through the media," ricone said he wanted a meet- it couldn't be arranged.

**t or lump it**  
Metro Airport brouhaha showed me can be flexible. He intended to investigators subpoena power, but I off when Wayne County officials to cooperate. In another example ability, Perricone, an avid hunter sherman who had trained his on relaxing the state's gun laws, back when the nation became a relations nightmare, in some things, he stops and does others think it is the right thing, their times he is like a bull in a shop," Stallworth said.  
id Perricone: "I don't have toler- for people who hold the chamber ge."  
tricone said he'll conduct him- the same way during his last 18 his as speaker. No excuses. No ges. "That's his style, like it or it."  
This has worked beyond anyone's est dreams," he said. "These peo- have performed well. We made try over the last five months. But ill have a lot to do."



Jack Graber / The Detroit News

State regulators said a gas buildup in the six-story Boiler No. 6 caused an explosion that started several fires in the plant that killed six workers and injured 14.

### ROUGE

Continued from Page 1A

"We have had discussions with Ford, and our clients will be reviewing this offer," said Gerard Manteso, an attorney for the three. He declined to comment further.

The agreements would not require the unanimous consent of the 20 workers and their families and would have a clause that if any future settlement was higher, all workers would get the same benefit, according to a Ford attorney.

In most cases, workers would receive payment almost immediately after the agreements are signed. In this case of the deceased workers, the settlement would likely have to go to a probate judge for approval and dispersal.

Since the explosion, Ford has quietly aided the families by picking up medical and transportation expenses. Ford Chief Executive Officer Jac Nassser and board Chairman William Clay Ford Jr. attended a private memorial breakfast at UAW Local 600 last month. Ford has donated \$100,000 to the UAW relief fund and did not contest claims for worker's compensation. Under the program, workers and relatives of deceased workers get a maximum of \$380 a week.

The settlement offer is extraordinary, legal experts said, because under Michigan Workers' Compensation law, it is nearly impossible in sue an employer for anything short of intentional harm.

"You have to show that the employer intended a specific harm to a specific employee. Negligence, recklessness or carelessness are not enough," said Barrie R. Brau, a workers' compensation attorney in Southfield. "Essentially, the law has eliminated probably 999 out of 1,000

claims. It may be even higher than that."

The family of the last remaining Ford worker hospitalized would not discuss whether they are going to accept the offer.

"No amount of money can make John the same," said Sandy Sklarczyk, whose husband, John, 47, was badly injured in the accident.

Over 85 percent of John Sklarczyk's body was burned and he was in critical condition for 1/2 months and at times in a coma. He remains hospitalized at St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center in Toledo.

"He is a very, very sick man and has a long, long road to recovery," said Sandy Sklarczyk, whose husband of 23 years was general foreman at the powerhouse. "I just pray he finds some peace. Please keep praying for him."

Over the last 1/2 months, he has had at least 30 operations, including cornea transplants. Friday, he will undergo another operation to remove his gall bladder.

Meanwhile, Dearborn Fire Chief Jack McArthur said Ford would submit a report on its findings during the nearly five-month investigation into the Rouge complex explosion by the third week in July, and after that a determination will be made on the exact cause of the explosion.

The investigation has centered on whether the valves were open to the boiler and whether they might have been leaking. Some employees have accused Ford of neglecting the boiler's maintenance, a contention the company denies.

The two state investigations — one into the Boiler No. 6 and a second into worker safety — will likely not be ready until August, said Maura Campbell, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

# Activist

### Head of California crime vict by sibling's grisly murder at

By Steve Geissinger  
Associated Press  
SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Nina Salarno was strolling recently, her fiance at her side, when she burst into tears.  
It had been 20 years, yet time hadn't blocked images of her sister on the same beach in Mexico shortly before she returned home to California and was murdered by an estranged boyfriend.  
Salarno, 33, hasn't hidden from the tragedy.

# Court trend sways right

### Conservative Reagan, Bush appointees now the majority among judges.

By David C. Savage  
Los Angeles Times  
WASHINGTON — As a 17-year-old freshman at Virginia Tech University, Christy Brzonkala turned first to school disciplinary authorities with her charge that two star football players had raped her.  
But they threw out the case against one of the players for lack of evidence, and sentenced the other to a "deferred suspension" that would take effect only when his football career was over.  
So Brzonkala went to the federal courts, relying on the new Violence Against Women Act. Not only did she not prevail, but the appeals court in Richmond, Va., threw out the law as an unconstitutional intrusion into states' rights.  
That March 5 decision stands out as an example of a new conservative activism sweeping the federal courts now that judges appointed by the last two Republican presidents, Ronald Reagan and George Bush, constitute