

Jury Strategy Essential for Wrongful Death Record Verdicts Says Houston Attorney

If the case is strong enough and the preponderance of evidence clearly shows a company is at fault- the plaintiff's case is most likely already won right? Not so, says [Houston attorney Rob Ammons](#). An attorney may win the case in court but the size of the verdict lies in the hands of jurors who will choose either to take a personal stake in the future of the plaintiff or simply carry out their duty as jurors.

“Recently we secured a record setting verdict for the family of a client killed in Hood County, Texas,” says Ammons. “An operator was working at a natural gas plant. The plant had what’s called a hot oil heater. The hot oil heater had been improperly installed, and had not been properly engineered. While the operator was using this heater, actually trying to light it, there was an [explosion](#), resulting in his death.”

At 82.5 million dollars in compensatory damages, this particular case ranks as the largest Harris County verdict in a personal injury case involving the wrongful death of one individual. Ammons believes in light of the recent news involving high profile worker and environmental safety accidents particularly with the BP spill; jury members were in a mood to punish energy companies for compromising safety for profits. Ammons focused on reinforcing that mindset.

“There were a variety of strategies that were used in this case. Number one, to introduce the jury to the decedent, to Josh Petrie. And he was just a wonderful young man. And a young man who had done everything the right way. But we also wanted to show the jury (and we did) the incentives that the companies have, and where their priorities were, and the fact that they did literally place their profit, or their pocketbook, over the safety of workers. And that they made decisions that which knowingly compromised safety.”

Ammons says imagery also played a key role in encouraging jurors to take a personal interest in his client's family's future.

“One of the primary strategies was to visualize things. We had a furnace that exploded because a company did not meet its obligation to comply with the safety standard. So, through a computer-aided animation, we showed how and why the [furnace exploded](#), as it was installed by this company. And we also showed what would have happened, under the same circumstances, if the safety standard had been followed. And we were able to show, and for the jury to see, that if the safety standards had been followed, there would have never been an explosion.”

Introducing the jury to the victim's young family seemed like a slam-dunk element of the strategy to win jurors over, but Ammons says he never considered it.

“I had three of the most beautiful young children, the oldest of which was 7, that you could ever imagine as clients in this case. And I did not even bring them into the courtroom. And I told the jury that I would not do that. Because I didn't want them to feel

like sympathy was anything that we were after in this case. We were after holding companies that had violated safety rules accountable for what they did. And I think that that theme resonates with jurors from all the way- from all sides of the spectrum. From the very most liberal to the very most conservative. Is that we will hold rule breakers responsible when they hurt or kill members of our community.”

Rob Ammons is Board Certified in Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization, in addition to being Board Certified in Civil Law by the National Board of Trial Advocacy. Rob Ammons’ law practice, [The Ammons Law Firm](#), is located in Houston, Texas. The Ammons Law Firm practice is exclusively personal injury law, handling such cases as: tire defects, oil rig explosions, truck accidents, plant explosions, refinery accidents, wrongful death, post-collision fires, seat belt defects, airbag defects, SUV rollovers and workplace negligence.