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Jury Awards \$34 Million To Guard In Crash

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TAMPA - A former armored car employee was awarded \$33.89 million by a Hillsborough County jury Tuesday, marking one of the largest verdicts in county history.

During a minor traffic accident in 1998, about 700 pounds of coins fell onto Daniel Hiscock as he rode in the back of an armored van, said his attorney, Steve Yerrid. The Zephyrhills resident, now 56, broke his neck and is quadriplegic.

The jury determined that Griffin Inc., the company that converted a van into the Loomis, Fargo & Co. armored vehicle, failed to install proper safety devices. Yerrid said the large award is justified and should serve as a warning to manufacturers of faulty products.

"` Maybe Dan Hiscock is not a CEO," Yerrid said, "` but I'll tell you, his suffering ... cried out for those damages."

Yerrid said he and officials with Griffin have come to an agreement in which the company will pay Hiscock less than the jury award. In exchange, the company has agreed not to appeal the verdict. The payment will remain an "` eight-digit figure," Yerrid said, although he would not disclose specific terms.

Officials with Griffin, based in Byhalia, Miss., declined to comment. The company's Web site says it is the largest manufacturer of "` armored cash-in-transit vehicles" in the United States.

Hiscock, through his attorney, said he was exhausted after the two-week trial and did not want to speak with the media, but he released a written statement.

"` I hope what I have gone through and what we accomplished will make things safer for the other guards out there whose lives are on the line every day," the statement read.

In 1999, Hiscock described the accident to a Tribune reporter.

It was a foggy day in October 1998. Hiscock was buckled into a seat in the rear of an armored van that delivered cash to ATMs and businesses.

As the van approached a railroad crossing on U.S. 41 near Gibsonton, it struck a tractor-trailer stopped at the tracks. Yerrid said the impact was not severe but that the coins fell on top of Hiscock, breaking his right leg and fracturing a vertebra in his neck.

A wall prevented the van's cargo from injuring the driver, but no similar protection was available for Hiscock, Yerrid said.

Hiscock filed suit on behalf of himself and his wife. His wife died last month from heart disease.

The lawsuit also named a woman involved in the accident, the tractor-trailer company and the seat belt manufacturer. All settled with Hiscock prior to the trial.

Reporter Thomas W. Krause can be reached at (813) 259-7698. **Guard's Award Is Big, But Others Surpass It**

Tuesday's jury verdict of nearly \$34 million is not Hillsborough County's largest.

In 2001, a Wesley Chapel doctor, diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, won a \$36.7 million verdict in federal court.

John Tedesco had a disability policy from Paul Revere Life Insurance Co. that provided coverage if he no longer could work as an ophthalmologist. The company made the disability payments for five months, then stopped, arguing that Tedesco was responsible for ending his career when he closed the practice.

A jury disagreed.

In 1995, a jury awarded the parents of a 9-year-old boy \$500 million after their son was killed by chemical fumes. He and another boy were playing in an unprotected garbage bin filled with illegally dumped toxic waste.

No one from the company, Durex Industries, appeared at the trial. The judgment was made against a company that no longer existed.

A former Durex executive later agreed to pay the families of the two boys \$400,000 each.

Researcher Diane Grey and reporter Thomas W. Krause compiled this report.

This story can be found at: <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGA8OI9TKTD.html>

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