

By Paula Reed Ward/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
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Family wins \$109 million judgment in Irwin electrocution death

An Irwin man won a \$109 million judgment this afternoon in a wrongful death lawsuit against West Penn Power Company.

The jury deliberated about two hours before returning the verdict in favor of Michael Goretzka and his two young daughters, Chloe and Carley. The judgment included \$61 million in punitive damages.

The complaint in Allegheny County Common Pleas Court was filed after the electrocution death of Carrie Goretzka.

She was killed in June 2009 when a power line fell into the family's yard.

Shanin Specter, who represents the Goretzkas, argued that the line fell because West Penn employees failed to properly install it. Manufacturers instructions called for the splices to be wire brushed to remove oxidation before installation, but Mr. Specter said the utility company's employees regularly failed to do that.

The line in the Goretzkas' yard had fallen twice before.

Mrs. Goretzka, 39, was inside her home with her two daughters and mother-in-law when the power went out on that clear June afternoon. She looked outside and saw trees in her yard on fire. She retrieved her cell phone from her car and stood in the side yard to call 911 when the line fell on her.

The electrified wire caused her to catch on fire. Her mother-in-law tried to help but was burned. It took 20 minutes before crews arrived and shut off the power.

Mrs. Goretzka suffered severe burns over 80 percent of her body and died from her injuries three days later.

Judge Michael Della Vecchia said it was the largest personal injury verdict awarded in Allegheny County.

[See more stories on the Goretzka case](#)