

# DuluthNewsTribune

## Blandin loses \$2 million work-site suit

**COURTS: Blandin Paper Co. is found to be negligent for injuries suffered by two workers**

**BY MARK STODGHILL**  
NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Two electrical workers who were injured when they came into contact with a chemical spray while working at the Blandin Paper Co. in 1997 have been awarded nearly \$2 million by an Itasca County jury.

Scott T. Johnson of Chisholm and Gary L. Corradi of Jacobson, Minn., sued the Grand Rapids paper company in 1998. They alleged that Blandin negligently sprayed them with a caustic and corrosive chemical used to clean one of its paper-making machines while the men were doing electrical work.

The plaintiffs claimed Blandin failed to warn them about the dangers involved in the use of the spray, that it maintained its premises in an unsafe condition, that it failed to provide adequate safety equipment and that it continued to spray the chemical in the area where they were working.

After a three-day trial in Grand Rapids, a four-woman, two-man jury deliberated about five hours Wednesday before reaching verdicts in favor of the plaintiffs.

Jurors found that Blandin was 100 percent negligent in the application or use of the chemical spray and that the negligence was a direct cause of Johnson's and Corradi's injuries on or about Sept. 10, 1997.

According to evidence presented to jurors, Corradi, who was an apprentice electrician, sustained serious injury to his mucous membrane system and an eye injury that necessitated a cornea transplant, leaving him with serious vision problems.

Corradi, 35, was awarded \$1,018,733.38, which included \$700,000 for loss of future earning capacity; \$135,984 for past wage loss; \$104,389.43 for future health care expenses; \$35,000 for future pain, disability and emotional distress; \$25,000 for past pain, disability and emotional distress; and \$18,359.95 for past health care expense.

Johnson, a journeyman electrician, suffers from a respiratory condition as a result of his exposure to the chemical spray, preventing him from working in areas contaminated by smoke or fumes.

Jurors awarded Johnson \$930,296.12, which included \$647,607 for loss of future earning capacity; \$161,902 for past wage loss; \$50,914.50 for future health care expense; \$35,000 for future pain, disability and emotional distress; \$25,000 for past pain, disability and emotional distress; and \$50,914.50 for future health care expense.

Corradi and Johnson were with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in Hibbing when they took jobs with Lakehead Electric Co. on a project at Blandin.

The men were represented in court by 35-year Hibbing lawyer Ed Matonich, his daughter, Julie Matonich, and David Arndt.

“Unfortunately, it’s another example of what happens during the downsizing and outsourcing prevalent in the corporate world,” Ed Matonich said.

“Blandin no longer has the maintenance crew or crews that they had in the past. Therefore, in situations where they are in a pinch they go outside and hire millwrights, electricians, carpenters and these men and women come onto the scene unaware of what’s going on. In this case a caustic and corrosive chemical base was sprayed on Mr. Corradi and Mr. Johnson, who knew nothing of the inherent extreme dangers of the product being sprayed on them.”

Grand Rapids attorney Leif Nelson defended Blandin against the lawsuit. “The attorneys for the defendant believe the verdict is not supported by the evidence,” he said.

It was Matonich’s second multimillion-dollar win for working-class clients in two years. A St. Louis County jury in 2002 awarded a Hibbing man, also represented by Matonich, \$3.1 million for injuries he received after falling from an aerial lift truck while working on power lines for the city of Virginia.