

Jury awards nearly \$4M to man injured by log at Frenchtown mill



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Jurors awarded a \$3.97 million settlement Wednesday to a Bonner man who was injured while unloading logs at a Frenchtown mill in 2008.

According to a complaint filed by law firm Hoyt and Blewett, Allen Ginn suffered a brain injury and a fractured back and pelvis when a log “sprung loose” and fell on him at the Smurfit-Stone Container Corp. mill.

A four-day hearing in Missoula County District Court ended Wednesday with the jury awarding Ginn and his wife Laurie \$220,899.56 for medical expenses, \$1.5 million for future care and \$2.25 million for future lost earnings and other damages.

“Those 12 jurors were extremely attentive for four straight days,” lead attorney Zander Blewett said in an interview Thursday. “They heard a lot of evidence and arguments. We think they were very concerned and did the right thing.”

Blewett argued Smurfit-Stone failed to provide an operable rack to hold the logs in place and implemented an “inherently dangerous method and procedure for unloading logs” without first securing the load.

The complaint alleges that in July 2008, Ginn drove his truck to the designated unloading area, where he was instructed to release the tie-downs on the load without first securing it with an external device.

A log from the top of the load fell on Ginn while he attempted to move out the way, injuring him severely.

Since then, Ginn has lost his trucking company and found only part-time employment as a maintenance man at a local golf course, Blewett said. Ginn went from making a six-figure salary to earning \$12,500 a year at the golf course.

He continues to suffer from seizures, chronic fatigue and memory loss, Blewett said.

“Smurfit-Stone argued vehemently that it wasn’t near that bad,” Blewett said. “They had their evidence and we had ours. I think the jury just thought ours was more truthful.”

Smurfit-Stone Container Corp. has since gone bankrupt. Georgia-based RockTenn bought the Frenchtown mill in 2011.

Attorneys for Smurfit-Stone could not be reached for comment Thursday.