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Hillsborough jury awards \$64M to work-site accident victim

By [Elizabeth Behrman](#)



Robert Matthews, then 25, slid under a pre-manufactured building in September 2010 to install it on a prepared site near the entrance of a Polk County mine owned by Mosaic Fertilizer, the lawsuit says.
TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

TAMPA — A Hillsborough County jury late Friday awarded \$64 million in damages to a man his lawyers say was “nearly cut in half” almost five years ago when a building collapsed on him.

Robert Matthews, then 25, slid under a pre-manufactured building in September 2010 to install it on a prepared site near the entrance of a Polk County mine owned by Mosaic Fertilizer, the lawsuit says. The site wasn’t properly prepared and leveled by Mosaic’s contractor, Bartow-based Semco Construction, so when Matthews began removing the axles and wheels used to install the building, it partially collapsed on him.

The lawsuit also maintains neither Mosaic, Semco nor Williams Scotsman, the company that manufactured the building, had necessary building permits for the job.

Matthews, who lives in Seminole County, suffered “catastrophic” injuries, said his Tampa attorney, Steve Yerrid. His pelvis and hip were fractured and an artery in his right leg was severed, among numerous other injuries that left him permanently disabled after dozens of surgeries and three months in a hospital.

“He’s going to hurt every day,” Yerrid said. “He’s going to have a little bit of hell with him for the rest of his life.”

The verdict likely is one of the largest settlements ever rendered in Tampa, Yerrid said.

Mosaic previously settled with Matthews for an undisclosed amount, Yerrid said. But Semco was taken to court.

The jury deliberated for more than four hours before reaching a verdict at about 11:30 p.m. Friday, Yerrid said.

Mosaic, which also owns a large phosphate mine in eastern Hillsborough County, was found responsible for 75 percent of the damages. A portion of the liability also fell on Mark Rice Inc., Matthews' employer, which was hired by Williams Scotsman to install the pre-prepared building.

Semco was found to be responsible for 15 percent of the \$64 million, which equates to about \$10 million. The construction company also must pay about \$500,000 to cover Matthews' legal fees, Yerrid said.

No one from Semco immediately responded to requests for comment Saturday.

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