

\$3,075,000

Oilfield Explosion  
**NEGLIGENT JOB PLANNING**

**FACTS:** Herbert Delaney, Jr. (decedent) was working for Pool Well Services Company. Pool was hired by Matrix Oil Corporation to attempt to increase the production of a well owned by Matrix in Whittier, California. Pool had a crew of 5 employees working at the Whittier oil well. Decedent was the crew chief. During their work on the well, Pool employees used a rig (crane) to attempt to pull the tubing from the well which was approximately 9,000 feet deep. The tubing became stuck. At the time of the accident, the Pool employees were setting up the equipment needed to circulate KCL liquid (water with potassium chloride) down the well in order to attempt to free the stuck tubing. While setting up the equipment to circulate the KCL liquid, the well head was left open. Flammable gas and/or vapor was unexpectedly released from the open well head and ignited by the engine on the rig which was located in close proximity to the well. An explosion and subsequent fire occurred.

**CONTENTIONS:** Plaintiffs claimed that Briones Oilfield Services was hired by Matrix as the “operator” of the Whittier oil well and that Briones was under a duty to insure that the well was operated according to the terms and conditions of the permits with the City of Whittier. Plaintiffs claimed that the decision to attempt to circulate the well with KCL liquid was a joint decision between Matrix, Briones and Pool and that Briones knew the well head would need to be open during the circulation process which may allow oil and/or natural gas to be vented to the atmosphere in violation of the permits with the City of Whittier. Defendants claimed that the sole cause of the accident was the negligence of decedent and his employer. Defendants claimed that it was Pool’s decision as the experts in oil well maintenance to attempt to circulate the KCL liquid with the well head open, that Pool’s own written safety policies specifically prohibited wells from being circulated with the well head open, that Pool’s job supervisor who was on-site at the time of the accident was terminated after the accident for violation of Pool’s safety policies, and that there was no reason to have the well head open while “setting up” the equipment to be used to circulate the well.

**INJURIES:** Death of a 49 year old. Plaintiffs are his wife and three children, who at the time of the accident were ages 14, 16 and 17.

**DELANEY v. MATRIX OIL CORPORATION, ET AL.**

**CASE NUMBER:** VC 046677

**LOS ANGELES SUPERIOR COURT**