

# Jury awards \$2.5 million in man's fatal crushing by lift

By **CHANDA TEMPLE**  
News staff writer

A jury has ordered an Indiana lift company to pay \$2.5 million in damages after one of its lifts fatally crushed a Haleyville man while he worked at a door manufacturing plant.

Attorneys for the family of Jonathan Shaffer, 19, said he was working on the assembly line at Premdor Inc., a door maker in Haleyville, when he

climbed into a five-foot deep pit to clean up wood debris in August 2001.

While he was in the pit, a hose on a hydraulic scissor lift that lowers door parts into the pit for additional assembly, ruptured. The lift's hydraulic system failed and the lift lowered onto Shaffer, according to plaintiff's attorney Tom Melton of Birmingham.

The lift was made by Indiana's American Lifts, which is a

division of Yale Industrial Products Inc., Melton said.

Melton argued that American Lifts failed to protect the hose and install a safety valve. He said the defense claimed that Shaffer's own negligence led to his injuries. Melton, however, showed that the U.S. Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited Premdor in 2002 for failing to adequately train employees on procedures to be

*"The jury sent a message to American Lifts to redesign their lifts to protect workers."*

**Tom Melton**  
plaintiff's attorney

used before entering the pit, and failing to provide adequate equipment to protect workers before entering the pit.

Efforts Friday to reach the Birmingham attorney for American

Lifts were unsuccessful. Melton, who tried the case with attorneys Bill Atkinson of Hamilton and Tom Willingham of Birmingham, said the accident happened the third week Shaffer had been on the job. At the

time, Shaffer had a wife and a 4-week old daughter.

"He was eager to start a new job and to support his new little girl and his family," Melton said. "It was just a real sad, sad case."

A Marion County jury issued the verdict Wednesday in the wrongful death suit. "The jury sent a message to American Lifts to redesign their lifts to protect workers," Melton said.

**E-MAIL:** [ctemple@bhamnews.com](mailto:ctemple@bhamnews.com)