

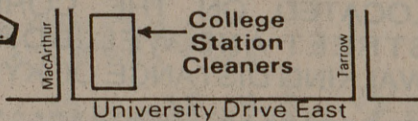
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Widow calls NASA uncaring, urges families to file suit

SPACE CENTER, Houston (AP) — The widow of an astronaut who died in a spacecraft fire says NASA and the space contractors are uncaring and negligent and urges the families of those killed in the Challenger explosion to file suits.

"I'd file a lawsuit because I know right now that they don't care anything about you," said Betty Grissom, widow of astronaut Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom. "They don't care about me, financially or morally."

Grissom and astronauts Edward White and Roger Chaffee died on Jan. 27, 1967, when a fire erupted inside their Apollo 1 spacecraft while they conducted tests on a Kennedy Space Center launch pad.

In a copyright story Tuesday in the *Houston Chronicle*, Mrs. Grissom she would have received no money from her husband's death if Houston attorney Ronald D. Krist had not filed a last-minute lawsuit for her in 1972 against North American Aviation, the Apollo's prime contractor.

The suit was filed just three days before the Florida statute of limitations expired. Mrs. Grissom received \$350,000 on the grounds that her husband endured conscious pain and suffering for 17 seconds.

Krist now is representing Cheryl McNair, widow of Challenger astronaut Ronald E. McNair, in a suit filed last fall against Morton Thiokol, Inc., the manufacturer of the solid rocket booster blamed for the Challenger explosion.

The lawyer also represents the parents of two other Challenger crew members. Jane Smith, widow of Challenger pilot Michael Smith, has filed a \$15.1 million claim against the government, but is represented by another attorney.

Four Challenger families recently settled with the government for about \$1 million apiece.

Mrs. Grissom said she believes the settlement, which she called "still kind of cheap," would not have been made except for the McNair suit.

"The federal government would never have paid a dime to any of them," she said. "I don't want to give the Challenger families advice, but they might learn something from my experience. . . . I didn't know anything about the statute of limitations and all of that."

Mrs. Grissom said after her husband died, she was living on about \$500 a month for herself and her two teen-age sons.

"I think that's what happened to Mrs. Smith," Mrs. Grissom said. "She looked at her paycheck and her children and thought maybe she ought to do something. I admire her guts for doing it."

Grissom was a graduate of Purdue University and Mrs. Grissom said the school gave her two sons scholarships, "or else we would never have made it."

She said Purdue probably did more for her sons than NASA or the federal government did.

Mrs. Grissom said the public has had more sympathy for the Challenger families than it did for the widows of the Apollo 1 astronauts.

"I think the general public has gotten behind the Challenger tragedy, in sympathy and understanding that it may not have had for the Apollo 1 fire, because Christa McAuliffe, the schoolteacher, was aboard," Mrs. Grissom said.

"But we didn't have a schoolteacher on Apollo 1," she said. "We had military men."

At-home smoking ban imposed on workers

CHICAGO (AP) — Lighting up at home or in the workplace will cost employees their jobs at nine USG Acoustical Products plants, and the company plans to conduct lung tests to make sure workers are complying with the smoking ban.

"It will apply to everybody in the plants, from the newest hourly worker on up to the plant manager — without exception," spokesman Paul Colitti said Tuesday at USG Corp., holding company for the building-products manufacturer.

One of the plants to be affected by the policy is in Corsicana, Texas.

The quit-smoking-or-quit policy will apply to 1,500 to 2,000 company workers in eight states, Colitti said.

Employees must also refrain from smoking off the job, he said.

The policy, which won't apply at USG's corporate headquarters in Chicago, raised questions among legal scholars and outraged the Tobacco Institute, an industry group that called the ban an invasion of privacy.

"I think this would easily be the most punitive or asinine proposal we've seen," said spokesman Scott Staph at the institute in Washington. "Obviously there's just an incredible invasion of privacy concern."

Colitti said smokers will be given an opportunity to participate in organized kick-the-habit programs in May or June.

They can enroll in a company-sponsored Smoke Enders clinic on company time or be reimbursed for programs recommended by their own physicians.

After the six- to eight-week clinic by Smoke Enders, a national organization that counsels smokers on quitting, USG will give workers a grace period of about one week to kick the habit, Colitti said.

"Then we administer a pulmonary function test that measures lung capacity, among other things," he said. "We'll know then if they are still smoking. If they are, we'll have no choice but to let them go."

Colitti said there is no history of lung ailments among workers at the plants, which use mineral fiber and rock wool to make thermal insulation and acoustical tiles.

He said USG is implementing the policy for health reasons, noting statistics showing non-smokers have fewer sick days.

"It's one question to restrict smoking on the job," said Staph at the Tobacco Institute. "But when you go beyond that and say you can't smoke in your backyard . . . obviously people are going to have some problems with that."

He said the institute received several calls from USG workers who opposed the policy and said things like, "Did I wake up this morning in the Soviet Union?"

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Texas banks report losses; RepublicBank posts gain

Texas banks, InterFirst Corp. and Texas Commerce Bancshares, reported fourth-quarter losses, partly because of bad loans, while RepublicBank Corp. bucked the trend and posted a gain, officials said Tuesday.

Dallas-based InterFirst lost almost \$50 million during the last quarter of 1986, and Texas Commerce Bancshares of Houston suffered a net loss of \$21 million, the companies reported.

Texas Commerce's performance prompted its board of directors to halve the quarterly dividend.

The firm and its 70 banks are presently merging with Chemical New York Corp. in a cash and stock transaction valued at \$1.1 billion.

Meanwhile, Dallas-based RepublicBank, which plans to merge with InterFirst later this year, reported fourth-quarter income of \$9.1 million.

RepublicBank's earnings of 26 cents per share compared with a net income of \$33.5 million, or \$1.10 per share, during the same quarter of 1985, the company said.

Its yearly income of \$54 million, or \$1.65 per share, compared with \$140.2 million, \$4.60 per share, in 1985.

InterFirst said its fourth-quarter loss of \$49.6 million, 74 cents per share, compared with net income of \$13.7 million, or 20 cents per share, during the fourth quarter of 1985.

For the full year, InterFirst reported a loss of \$326.5 million, or

\$4.86 per share, compared with income of \$61.1 million, 91 cents per share, in 1985.

The two Dallas bank holding companies announced Dec. 16 that they had reached an agreement to merge.

RepublicBank is the country's 20th largest bank holding company with 41 member banks and total assets of \$20.9 billion as of Dec. 31. InterFirst had assets of \$18 billion at year's end.

Texas Commerce said it lost \$21 million in its fourth quarter, largely because it took a \$125 million provision for bad loans.

The company recorded a loss of 64 cents per share in the fourth quarter, an \$8 million improvement from the \$29 million net loss, or 88 cents per share, for the same period in 1985.

Net income for the year declined more than 60 percent, from \$53 million, or \$1.62 per share, in 1985 to \$20 million, or 61 cents per share, for 1986.

Texas Commerce spokesman Mike Cinelli attributed the loss in 1986's last quarter to the company's continuing to build a reserve against possible losses while also charging off non-performing loans.

Nevertheless, the board of directors voted Tuesday to cut the quarterly dividend to 19 1/2 cents per share to build further capital.

The dividend will be paid April 1 to shareholders of record as of March 13.

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