

Former addicts file lawsuit against OxyContin maker

JONESVILLE, Va. (AP) — A multibillion-dollar lawsuit has been filed against the makers of the painkiller OxyContin and two doctors, claiming they failed to warn patients that the drug was dangerously addictive.

The drug, intended for use by terminal cancer patients and chronic pain sufferers, has been linked to at least 120 overdose deaths nationwide.

The suit was filed Friday in Lee County Circuit Court by seven people who are former addicts or relatives of addicts. The suit, which seeks class-action status for other victims, al-

leges the drug's makers aggressively marketed the painkiller while downplaying its risks.

Named as defendants are Purdue Frederick Co., Purdue Pharma L.P. and Purdue Pharma Inc., all based in Stamford, Conn., and Abbott Laboratories Inc. and Abbott Laboratories, both based in Chicago.

On Monday, West Virginia also sued the makers of OxyContin, claiming they tried to get doctors to overprescribe the drug while failing to warn of its potential for abuse.

"What has happened is an atrocity," said Dawn Stewart of Hedrichsen Siegel, a Washing-

ton law firm representing the plaintiffs.

"We have reason to believe there could be potentially thousands affected by OxyContin," Stewart said.

"What happened is an atrocity."

— Dawn Stewart lawyer

Also named in the suit are doctors Richard Norton and Shireen Brohi. Norton is a former emergency room doctor

now serving a federal prison sentence in South Carolina for embezzling from a hospital.

"I do not prescribe the drug and I have no comment," Brohi told the Associated Press Saturday. She then said she has prescribed the drug once in the last six to eight months.

Calls to a Purdue Pharma official were not immediately returned Saturday.

The plaintiffs are seeking more than \$5.2 billion in compensatory damages from Purdue. They also want the pharmaceutical giant to set up rehabilitation facilities in the region and provide ongoing

medical monitoring for patients using the drug.

If taken properly, Oxycontin's active ingredient is released slowly into the body. But abusers circumvent the time-release by crushing the pills and inhaling or injecting the powder to get the same kind of euphoric high that heroin brings.

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has chosen Mississippi, West Virginia, Virginia, Florida and Ohio to participate in a pilot program to monitor prescriptions and try to stop OxyContin abuse.

Allison results in more deaths

HATBORO, Pa. (AP) — A week after causing \$2 billion in damage in Houston, the remnants of Tropical Storm Allison flooded homes in southeastern Pennsylvania, blacked out thousands of customers and chased firefighters up trees.

Four deaths were linked to the storm in Pennsylvania, authorities said Sunday, pushing the total blamed on Allison since it made landfall in Texas to at least 43.

"I've never seen anything like this in my entire life," Madeline Smith said as she picked her way through twisted metal and other debris left in her yard when Pennsylvania Creek rose out of its banks Sunday and boyfriend Ken Edwards were rescued from chest-deep water rushing past their home Saturday by holding onto a rope pulled by firefighters.

The rain tapered off Sunday in Pennsylvania, which got up to 9 inches, as the storm moved through New Jersey and New York into New England and to sea. Parts of New Jersey received more than 5 inches of rain, flooding roads.

Firefighters on Saturday rescued about 30 residents from flooded Village Green apartments in Horsham, 16 miles north of Philadelphia. One building in the complex was struck by a natural gas explosion and fire, and the rising water prevented firefighters from battling the flames.

"We lost everything. We all about lost our lives," Geneva Meyers said. "I was scared to death."

Myers, 65, and her husband Bill, 72, scrambled into a firefighters' boat from a second-story window after the fire forced them from their first floor apartment.

On Sunday, four bodies were found in the complex's most heavily damaged building where the fire occurred, Upper Merland Police Chief William Moffett.

"We think that everything was caused by the flood initially," Moffett said. "It appears the water damage caused a gas leak somewhere, which caused the fire. And the deaths apparently were fire deaths."

At least two people were unaccounted for, he said.

BASEBALL
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"There was a little bit of dirt on the right side and I had to make a decision."
Tim Crabtree (0-5) took the loss for Texas and Nelson Cruz (1-1) pitched the eighth for the first win.

On Sunday, the Rangers got another rare quality pitching performance while the Astros returned to normal. Texas used a four-run fourth inning, capped by Alex Rodriguez's 20th home run of the year to beat Houston 6-2. Rangers starter Darrel Oliver baffled every Astro except second baseman Craig Biggio, who homered twice to the count for both Astro runs. Oliver raised his record to 6-0 while Astros starter Scott Linton had his record go to 4-1. The game drew a crowd of 43,277, breaking the attendance record set on the previous two evenings.

News in Brief

Mother, three children killed in auto accident
GERMANTOWN, Md. (AP) — A car collided with a pickup truck on a rain-wet road Saturday, killing a mother and three of her children, police said. The family's car crossed the center line, then struck a guardrail, Montgomery County police spokeswoman Debbie Marshal said. The truck's driver tried to swerve but could not avoid the car. Killed were Laura Delgado, 29, and children Victor Delgado, 10; Andrea Delgado, 6; and 1-year-old Isabella Delgado. The truck driver was unhurt.

Former workers asked to return severance pay
EUGENE, Ore. (AP) — A computer factory that overpaid dozens of former workers thousands of dollars in severance pay wants them to "kindly return" the money. San Jose, Calif.-based Komag Inc., a computer disc manufacturer, laid off hundreds of workers at its Eugene plant in January and issued severance checks. But about 60 workers, and an undetermined number of California employees, got too much money. Many have already returned the money, but some said they already spent it and cannot pay it back. Employment lawyers said the case is unusual — and difficult to resolve — because the workers are no longer on Komag's payroll. Typically, a company can deduct the difference from a paycheck, said Christine Hammond, administrator of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries wage and hour division.

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Boy missing since '79 will be declared dead

NEW YORK (AP) — In 1979, after 6-year-old Etan Patz vanished as he walked to a bus stop in lower Manhattan, his parents vowed they would never give up hope. And they did not.

They kept the same phone number because Etan had memorized it. They remained in their SoHo apartment, because it was the only home Etan ever had.

So it was clearly a difficult decision for Stanley and Julie Patz to file court papers more than two decades later, asking that Etan be declared legally dead. The doe-eyed little boy, whose disappearance spawned the national movement to publicize the cases of missing children, would no longer be classified as missing.

At a court hearing Tuesday, the Patzes' lawyer, Brian O'Dwyer, is expected to present evidence that while Etan's body has never been found, his parents believe they know his fate.

If a judge declares Etan dead, it will clear the way for the Patzes to file a wrongful death lawsuit against Jose Antonio Ramos, a Pennsylvania inmate whom the family believes molested and then killed Etan.

Money is not the issue. "The Patz family feels that on some level, this will help them bring closure and place blame where blame is deserved," said Stuart GraBois, a former assistant U.S. attorney who serves as the family's adviser.

Stanley Patz sends Ramos a

copy of Etan's missing child poster twice every year — on his son's birthday in October, and on the anniversary of his disappearance.

"I write on the back, 'What did you do to my little boy?'" Patz said.

Ramos remains in the Smithfield Correctional Institution in Huntingdon, Pa. His sentence for molesting two other boys runs until March 13, 2014; he was denied parole last year and will not be eligible for release again until June 2003.

Even if Etan is declared legally dead, his case will remain open with the police department, and the cold case squad will continue to investigate it.

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