

Jury awards \$38.5 million-plus in fatal shooting at plant

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PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The families of two women killed by a co-worker at a northeast Philadelphia plant 4½ years ago were awarded \$38.5 million in punitive damages from a security guard firm on Monday.

The decision by the Common Pleas Court panel came in the suit filed against U.S. Security Associates Inc. of Georgia in the September 2010 shooting deaths at the Kraft Foods plant. A separate panel earlier ordered the firm to pay more than \$8 million in compensatory damages.

Tatonya Brown, 36, and Tanya Wilson, 47, were killed and another employee wounded by a deluded employee who thought co-workers were spraying her with toxic chemicals, according to authorities. Yvonne Hiller, 48, who is serving two life terms in the slayings, had been suspended after making violent, profanity-laced threats but returned from her car minutes later with a loaded .357 Magnum, authorities said.

Attorneys for the families said security guards failed to protect employees during the rampage. **Attorney Shanin Specter said in a statement that the verdict sends a message that company guards "can't simply run away in the middle of the crisis. They actually have to act like security guards."**

U.S. Security Associates, however, vowed an appeal, saying in a statement that "the evidence presented was not sufficient for a punitive damages award." The firm also said its personnel "made reasonable decisions and acted with courage in the face of a direct threat to their own lives."

"In no sense did they or USSA display an intentional disregard for the safety of others," the company said while adding that "the people of USSA sympathize deeply" with the families of the victims.