

The Goretzka Case

Allegheny Energy sued over Irwin woman's death

By Paul Peirce, TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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Attorney for Hempfield family alleges utility procedures caused woman's death

An attorney for a Hempfield family suing Allegheny Energy over a woman's death when electric utility lines fell onto her in her yard has questioned the utility's maintenance procedures when installing lines.

Attorney Shanin Specter of Philadelphia alleges in the letter to the Public Utilities Commission that the maintenance errors uncovered in sworn depositions of several Allegheny Energy employees in the ongoing damage lawsuit continue to pose a danger to the public.

The problem "may cause additional lines to fall and people to die," Specter said in his letter to the PUC. "This must be remedied."

According to Specter, maintenance workers said they were trained to clean power lines with knives and other tools instead of wire brushes which — the attorney and the power line's manufacturer contend — is the only way to keep the lines from failing.

Specter filed a civil lawsuit in Allegheny County over the electrocution of Carrie Goretzka, 39, of Irwin in 2009. She died after she was trapped under a fallen power line outside her West Hempfield Drive home in view of her mother-in-law and two daughters, Chloe, then 4, and Carlie, 2.

Goretzka, who had burns over 85 percent of her body, died three days later in UPMC Mercy, Pittsburgh.

Specter has scheduled a press conference this afternoon at a Pittsburgh law firm to discuss the alleged maintenance problems and the ongoing lawsuit.