



Jury award in plant shooting emphasizes the need for proper security controls

BY CAROLINE RAMSEY-HAMILTON ON APR 22, 2015

Late last month, a Georgia jury awarded more than \$46 million to the families of two female workers, Tanya Wilson, 47, and LaTonya Brown, 36, who were shot to death by a co-worker at a Philadelphia Kraft Foods plant in 2010. Instead of filing a lawsuit against Kraft, the victims' families opted to go after the company that provided security at the factory, Georgia-based U.S. Security Associates.

After being suspended from her job at the plant on Sept. 10, 2010, the shooter, Yvonne Hiller, left the building but returned minutes later with a handgun which she used to kill Wilson and Brown and severely injure a third worker, Bryant Dalton. Hiller was sentenced to two consecutive life terms without the possibility of parole in 2012.

The jury held that U.S. Security Associates was negligent at the time of the shooting, accepting the families' argument that the company failed to adequately protect the workers. To demonstrate their claim, the families offered a surveillance video showing a supervisor running and hiding in a boiler room at the time of the incident.

"The verdict is an important message to U.S. Security that their guards can't simply run away run away in the middle of a crisis," said **Shanin Specter, of Kline & Specter, P.C., who represented the Wilson and Brown families. "They actually have to act like security guards."**

In a statement, a spokeswoman for U.S. Security Associates said that the company sympathizes with the victims' families, but they believe fault in the case lies solely with Hiller.

“U.S. Security Associates believes that its personnel on duty on the night of the North Philadelphia shooting 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. We are disappointed in today’s verdict and intend to appeal on the grounds that the evidence presented was not sufficient for a punitive damages award to be granted. At the same time, the people of USSA sympathize deeply with the families of Tanya Renee Wilson and LaTonya Sharon Brown, the two women who died in the shooting, and with Bryant Dalton, who was severely wounded.”

The award to the victims in this case was an outsize amount and it gives you an idea of the value of highly skilled security force. Having a highly trained and skilled service is certainly much different than having a security service that runs for cover at the sound of a gunshot. That being said, it’s easy to see why security has to be all about the controls.

Threat events can occur at any time, whether it’s an active shooter or a tornado. There may be hints of future violent behavior or statistics on how likely an incident is to happen, but the controls are where you get the protection.

Whether the best control is security training, security officers, Tasers, armed officers, access control systems, active monitoring, background checks, or another of the 75 controls we recommend, the basic controls need to be in place 100 percent of the time. Doing regular security risk assessments gives security program directors the opportunity to review both the control implementation levels and the threat level, so security can continually be improved and “tightened down” so that an organization is ready for whatever may happen.

Many organizations refuse to allow security officers to carry any kind of defensive weapons, whether it is pepper spray, Tasers or actual firearms. As the world gets more dangerous and incidents like this continue to occur, security controls will start to look very affordable.