

Wife sues contractor after man falls, dies at Sabine Pass rig

By **Sara Flores and Brandon Scott** Updated 9:04 am, Friday, September 2, 2016

Two days after a man fell 100 feet to his death from a rig on Sabine Pass, his wife filed a lawsuit against the private firm contracted to demolish it.

Ramiro Ayala, who was employed by **Environmental Remediation Services Inc.**, was working on the decommissioned rig Sovereign Explorer when he fell from the top deck.

According to the lawsuit, ERSI sent Ayala onto the rig without checking its safety first.

The lawsuit states that Ayala was standing on a piece of the rig that fell off and broke free.

Cade Bernsen, who is representing Ayala's family in the lawsuit, said he is seeking a restraining order to preserve evidence from the worksite.

An investigation by the law firm is in its early stages, but Bernsen said it's clear that Ayala's fall was the result of a structural failure.

"(Ayala) didn't just fall off the rig," Bernsen said. "From what we understand, a portion of the rig itself fell, taking him down with it. Something appears to have been structurally unsound and this shouldn't have happened."

OSHA has been conducting an investigation since Tuesday evening after Ayala's body was found.

Ayala's widow is planning her husband's funeral while raising their four children, Bernsen said.

The company has previously used explosives to attempt to demolish the rig, making it unsafe, the lawsuit states.

ERSI failed to provide a safe work environment with trained employees and safe equipment, because they knew the risks associated with Ayala's job, the lawsuit states, which makes his death the result of gross negligence.

Ayala's family seeks more than \$1 million.



Port Arthur Fire Department divers and the **U.S. Coast Guard** took six hours to recover Ayala's body from the water.

About halfway through the search for Ayala on Tuesday, a large catwalk was removed from the water.

During the search, officials suspected that Ayala was tangled in the debris, which fell off the rig at the time of the accident.

Once the catwalk was out of the water, officials continued their search after discovering that Ayala was not entangled in it.

ERSI was unavailable for comment.

<http://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Wife-of-man-who-fell-to-his-death-from-an-oil-rig-9198883.php>