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Construction Labor

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State News

Florida

Contractor Who Sought Workers' Comp After Worker's Death Accused of Fraud

TAMPA, Fla.--The owner of a central Florida electrical company was charged with workers' compensation fraud after filing for benefits for a worker who had died in an electrical transformer explosion, authorities announced Feb. 10 (*Florida v. Bee*, Fla.Cir.Ct., No. CF-06-000-951, 2/10/06).

In addition to the comp fraud charge, Edward L. Bee, owner of Bee Corp., faces one count of grand theft, the office of Chief Financial Officer Tom Gallagher said in a written statement. Bee's company conducted business as Harris Electric.

The charges were brought in Bartow, Fla., in Florida Circuit Court, 10th Judicial Circuit, Polk County. A court clerk said records did not indicate whether Bee was represented by an attorney.

The state investigation began after an employee leasing company that provided workers to Bee told authorities that he attempted to submit an employee application for James Blundell after the accident occurred, the statement said.

Blundell, who formerly worked for Harris through the leasing company, died from burns three days after the 2004 accident occurred.

A state investigator told BNA that Blundell and others worked part-time for Harris Electric and that Bee kept a separate "contract labor" payroll for those workers of \$21,000. The amount would have resulted in a workers' comp insurance premium of about \$2,400, the statement said.

Failure to provide coverage jeopardized death benefits for Blundell's family,

Gallagher said.

"This is an especially sad case where a family has to deal with financial burden in addition to their grief," Gallagher said in the statement.

"Workers' compensation coverage ensures workers and their employers, especially those in high-risk jobs, have a safety net in the event of an accident."



By Drew Douglas

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