

The victims of the Deepwater Horizon explosion

Andre Damon
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The *Times* of London published Friday the first complete list of the oil workers killed in the April 20 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig off the coast of Louisiana.

The media has largely kept quiet on the human impact of the disaster, with only the occasional local paper bearing a story on one or another of the missing workers.

One of those killed on the rig was Karl Kleppinger, 38, of Natchez, Mississippi, who leaves behind a wife, Tracy, and a 17 year-old son, Aaron. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with the Kleppingers' attorney, Steve Gordon, whose law firm, Gordon, Elias, & Seely L.L.P., is representing the family against British Petroleum, rig operator Transocean, and other rig subcontractors.

"The human tragedy has been less visible, because the workers who were killed came from all over the Gulf Coast, from Texas, Louisiana," Gordon said.

Gordon said that Kleppinger was a "simple man" who had fought in the first Gulf War before beginning work on oil rigs.

"Karl was a floor hand, worked for Transocean for 10 years," Gordon said. "He never missed one hitch." Gordon said that Karl once volunteered to rescue a deep-water drill ship in the gulf and helped save the vessel from going under, even though he was never trained as a diver.

The family is suing the company for damages under the Merchant Marine Act, also known as the Jones Act, which requires the owners of ships and oil rigs to pay reparations to families killed in "unseaworthy" craft or under unsafe conditions.

Gordon said that the Kleppingers' employer, Transocean, bears the main responsibility for his death, but that other parties are guilty of negligence, including

BP and Halliburton, which was contracted to do cementing work on the rig.

"The impetus of these companies is profit, not safety," Gordon said. "As a result, a horrific event occurred that will affect the lives of a lot of people, and certainly the environment for decades."

"The companies like to say that there is a safety culture," Gordon added, "But the safety culture is subordinate to the profits culture."

Gordon said that in the immediate aftermath of the explosion survivors were held offshore and not allowed to talk to their families until 3:00 in the morning on Thursday, 29 hours after the blast.

"The company lawyers took statements from them and would not let them talk to their families," Gordon said. "So for about 17 hours they played around with these guys. They're not even admitting they did it."

Gordon said several other lawsuits are being launched by survivors and the families of the victims.

Thus far BP has admitted responsibility for all environmental damage due to the spill, but the company has refused to accept responsibility for its role in the deaths of the workers.

The men killed in the disaster leave behind mourning families and communities. They include:

- Adam Weise, who was mourned at a vigil attended by hundreds of people in his community of Yorktown, Texas, last week. "Adam was my baby, just 24 years old," the man's mother, Arlene Weise told reporters.
- Aaron Dale Burkeen, a 37-year-old resident of Neshoba County, near Philadelphia, Mississippi. A local paper reported that Burkeen was responsible for getting the other crew members to safety before leaving, but was unable to get off the rig in time. He is survived by a wife and two children, ages 14 and 6.
- Donald Clark, 49, of Newellton, Louisiana, was

scheduled to leave the rig on April 21, the day after the explosion.

- Roy Kemp, 27, Jonesville, Louisiana, leaves behind two daughters, one three years old, the other three months old, and his wife, Tracy.

- Jason Anderson, of Bay City, Texas, also leaves behind two children.

- Stephen Curtis, 39, of Georgetown, Louisiana, is also survived by two children. He had been working in the oil industry for 17 years, following in the footsteps of his father, Howard, who worked as a diver-welder for 34 years.

- Gordon Jones, 28, of Louisiana, leaves behind a son and a pregnant wife, Michelle.

- Blair Manuel, 56, of Gonzales, Louisiana, worked as a chemical engineer on the rig. He had three daughters and was engaged to be married.

- Dewey Revette, 48, from State Line, Mississippi, worked for Transocean for 29 years as a driller, and was also a father.

- Shane Roshto, 22, was from Franklin County, Mississippi. His widow, Natalie Roshto, has also launched a lawsuit against Transocean, BP, and Halliburton.

These men add to a large death toll on Gulf Coast oil rigs in recent years, giving the lie to claims that offshore oil drilling is now a safe industry. A recent review by federal regulators found that on Gulf of Mexico oil rigs there have been, since 2001, 69 workers killed, 858 fires and 1,349 injuries.

A search of its web site reveals that the White House has issued no statement of condolence for the victims of this most recent disaster.



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