

Chatsworth Metrolink train crash survivors, victims' families meet with Veolia executives

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Mackensie and Claudia Souser of Camarillo look at photos of Doyle Souser, who died in the Metrolink train crash in Chatsworth in September 2008.

The Metrolink train crash in Chatsworth two-and-a-half years ago killed 25 people and injured more than 100. In Simi Valley on Monday, survivors of the crash and victims' relatives met with executives from Veolia Transportation, the company that accepts liability for the collision.

Veolia Transportation employed the engineer an investigation found was sending text messages when the commuter train ran a stop signal and slammed into a Union Pacific Freight train. Veolia executives kept journalists outside the private meeting.

Mackenzie Souser of Camarillo, 15, said it was her first opportunity to tell company representatives what it was like to lose her father, Doyle, in the crash. "I was supposed to be at my 13th birthday party and... one of our family friends came out and said, they found your dad and he didn't make it," she said, as tears rolled down her cheeks. "That's pretty much my 13th birthday party."

Souser and her mother Claudia shared photos of father and husband Doyle Souser, who worked as a general manager at Stockton Products in Burbank. Relatives of other victims also brought photos.

A federal judge has approved a \$200 million settlement fund for victims of the crash. That's the federal liability cap in such a case, but many survivors and victims' families don't believe that amount will be enough. The medical bills of some of the injured have approached a million dollars.

After the meeting, Veolia Executive Vice President and General Counsel Alan Moldawer said the stories of personal loss and pain moved him, but he wasn't ready to address questions about the settlement amount.

"Tonight's not the time," he said. "Tonight's the time for the victims and their families. And that's why we're here to hear their stories and that's what we've done. There'll be another time to talk about the other questions that you have."

Congressman Elton Gallegly arranged the meeting. He recently introduced a bill that would raise the federal liability cap to \$275 million.

<http://www.scpr.org/news/2011/02/08/metrolink-mtg/>