

Firefighter's family sues alarm company

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The widow of a Contra Costa firefighter sued two security companies Tuesday she says are responsible for Engineer Scott Desmond's death last year in the county's worst firefighting tragedy.

Mistakes by an alarm company representative led to a nearly 10-minute delay from the moment the homeowners' fire alarm alerted her to when the first firefighter was dispatched, according to the lawsuit and a 122-page report by the Contra Costa Fire District.

"Both firefighters would have survived if proper information was given by the company who was hired to do that job," said **Walnut Creek attorney Andy Schwartz**, who is representing Desmond and her 2-year-old son, Tyler.

Carolyn Desmond is suing in Contra Costa Superior Court Utah-based Pinnacle Security, one of the country's largest residential alarm dealers, and Illinois-based Security Associates International, one of the largest alarm monitoring companies in the country, for what she says was Desmond's wrongful death.

Desmond, fire Capt. Matt Burton and husband-and-wife homeowners Gayle and Delbert Moore, died in the July 21, 2007, fire at 149 Michele Drive in unincorporated San Pablo.

Desmond's family is asking for unspecified damages.

"They're coping with an unimaginable loss," Schwartz said.

"Things will never be the same again for either of them."

On the night of the fire, homeowner Gayle Moore told a Pinnacle alarm company representative that there was an

active fire in their house over a two-way intercom system.

The alarm representative called the Contra Costa fire nonemergency dispatch line and told an operator there was a fire alarm report instead of relaying that she had spoken to the homeowner and was told a fire was burning.

The wrong terminology and incorrect phone line sent the call plummeting down the priority list.

A Security Associates International spokeswoman responded to the criticism in July: "SAI responded properly in all respects to signals received from the Moore's residence on July 21, 2007, and we have cooperated with all officials in the investigation of this case."

Calls to both security companies Tuesday were not returned.

The fire department report included other mistakes in fighting the blaze, including a chaotic scene in which firefighters worked independently of one another.

"I don't think it played as much of a role as the misinformation given the fire district from the private company," Schwartz said.

Reach Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5053 or mgafni@bayareanewsgroup.com.

Fire dispatch tapes

To hear the alarm company's exchange with the homeowner and Contra Costa fire dispatchers, visit ContraCostaTimes.com.



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