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Pesticide death brings call for reform

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An attorney who sued a Eugene-based pesticide firm over the death of a Florence woman said Wednesday that he intends to lobby the Oregon Legislature for tougher regulation of the pesticide industry.

Attorney Ralph Bradley said the man who sprayed chemicals that contributed to the June 2005 death of Florence Kolbeck, 76, was not licensed to spray chemicals in homes and had failed the licensing test seven times before the day he applied the sprays at her home.

Bradley said Kolbeck's death shows that the licensing system is failing.

"I'm hoping the Legislature will make the system more rigorous," he said. "Nobody wants a repeat of what happened to Florence Kolbeck."

A \$2.5million lawsuit by Kolbeck's husband, Fred Kolbeck, was settled before trial Tuesday for an undisclosed payment and without fixing blame for the death.

The company, Swanson's Pest Management, denied fault in the tragedy, asserted that the chemicals were applied correctly, and said the Kolbecks failed to properly ventilate their home after the application.

A state investigation determined that Florence Kolbeck's significant heart problems contributed to her vulnerability to respiratory problems that could have been triggered by the chemicals.

A federal investigation is not yet complete, Bradley said.

Fred Kolbeck decided to settle the case to avoid hearing up to 10 days of testimony about his wife's death, Bradley said. He and the couple's four children want Florence Kolbeck to be remembered for her 20-year nursing career, volunteerism and character rather than for a lawsuit over pesticide poisoning, he added.

Florence Kolbeck died of a heart attack a few hours after a Swanson's technician sprayed the couple's home on Ivy Street in Florence.

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