Widow of firefighter sues sofa store

April 12, 2008

Widow of firefighter sues sofa store

Furniture manufacturers, other firms also negligent in Baity's death, suit says

By Ron Menchaca
The Post and Courier
Saturday, April 12, 2008

The Post and Courier
Firefighter Coverage

The widow of Brad Baity, one of the nine Charleston firefighters killed in last year's Sofa Super Store blaze, filed a lawsuit Friday alleging that the store, several furniture manufacturers and other businesses are negligent in her husband's death.

The families of two other firefighters who perished June 18 — Capt. Billy Hutchinson and firefighter Melvin Champaign — filed similar wrongful-death lawsuits last year.

The suits target the site's owners, the manufacturers of the furniture in the store, a building contractor and the companies that built the fire doors that investigators later determined had malfunctioned.

"Brad Baity's family is looking for more answers as to the factors that contributed to his death in June 2007," said Motley Rice attorney Kevin Dean. "As they continue to grieve over the loss of their loved one, they seek accountability as well as a hope for change in industry standards to prevent others from having to face a similar tragedy."

More lawsuits could be on the horizon. Mount Pleasant attorney Larry Richter, who is representing the families of firefighters Louis Mulkey and Mike Benke, said Friday he is preparing lawsuits on behalf of his clients.

Richter said the suits would be similar to those already filed and that they would not name the city or its Fire Department. The earlier lawsuits also do not name any city officials, although Mayor Joe Riley and Fire Chief Rusty Thomas were subpoenaed in October as part of the Champaign lawsuit, the first to be filed.

Heather Baity is represented by the Motley Rice law firm and by attorney Thomas Woodley, whose firm represents the International Association of Fire Fighters. Brad Baity was the treasurer of the local chapter of the firefighters union.

©2026 Rosen Hagood All Rights Reserved | **Charleston, SC**

Roger Yow, president of the local union, said the national organization offered $10,000 in legal assistance to the families of all the fallen firefighters. He didn't know if any of the families have accepted the legal assistance.

Sofa store attorney Richard Rosen could not be reached for comment Friday. In response to the previous suits, Rosen said the store's owners have worked since the fire to ensure that a similar tragedy never occurs and have cooperated at every step of the investigations.

Jim Baity, the engineer's father, said he supports his daughter-in-law's decision to file the lawsuit. She needs to provide for her children's needs as the family struggles to cope with Brad Baity's loss, he said.

"It's still a shock to us," he said. "When you break up a family like that it's a bad situation."

©2026 Rosen Hagood All Rights Reserved | **Charleston, SC**