“Real Water” that poisoned dozens contained chemical from rocket fuel

Real Water sold in jugs.

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A jury this week awarded $228.5 million to seven plaintiffs in their case against Nevada-based water company Real Water, which sold alkaline water tainted with hydrazine, a highly toxic chemical found in fuel for rockets and spacecraft.

The plaintiffs included a 7-month-old boy who was hospitalized with severe liver failure and nearly needed a liver transplant. Another was a 69-year-old woman who was hospitalized for liver failure after drinking the water for years. She died in the hospital on November 11, 2020.

They are among around a hundred people who say they have suffered acute liver toxicity and failure from the water and have filed lawsuits against Real Water, according to attorney Will Kemp. In an interview Friday, Kemp told Ars he represents a little over 60 of the plaintiffs, including the seven in the case that received a jury verdict this week. It was the first case to go to trial.

Jurors for the case in the 8th Judicial District Court in Clark County, Nevada, found Real Water liable for $200 million in punitive damages and $28.5 million in compensatory damages. Two other defendants, Hanna Instruments and Milwaukee

Instruments, which were alleged to have made faulty water testing meters that contributed to Real Water's toxicity, were also found liable for compensatory damages but not punitive damages.

"We're hoping that the punitive award sends a message to people that they should test bottled water products before they put them on the market," Kemp told Ars.

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The jury trial, which spanned mid-September to this week, also revealed how the water poisoned people: It contained hydrazine, which was likely to have formed during the company's untested water processing method, according to Kemp and an expert witness.

Poisonous process

The poisonings came to light in early 2021 when the local authorities in Nevada and the Food and Drug Administration announced that at least five infants and children had suffered liver failure after drinking the water. The findings led to a recall, but some of the company's products remained on the market. In May 2021, the Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against Real Water Inc. on behalf of the FDA, alleging the company's officers, Brent Jones and his son, Blain Jones, were selling adulterated products made amid multiple manufacturing violations. As Ars previously reported, the Joneses agreed to settle the case in June, and the DOJ bound them with a permanent injunction from ever preparing, processing, or selling water again.

A study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in November 2021 laid out 25 cases of acute liver failure linked to the water—22 in Nevada and three in California, all of which occurred at the end of 2020. Specifically, the cases were linked to Real Water's 5-gallon

Re^{2}al Water product, sold in multiple southwestern states in places like Whole Foods.

- Images of Real Water’s “alkalized” products, which the FDA now says you should not drink or use.
- Many cases of liver damage were linked to home delivery.
- Box of Real Water bottles.
- Real Water bottles.
- Real Water concentrate.
- Real Water sold in jugs.

At the time, the company claimed its water was infused with negative ions and had an alkaline pH of 9.0. Marketing for Real Water made vague references to unproven health benefits, such as suggesting that drinking the water leads to “increased cellular hydration.”

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