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Corona trucking company conducted illegal gas tank repairs, leading to a worker death, grand jury alleges

By ANDREW KHOURI APR 26, 2018 | 3:35 PM



A gasoline tanker truck shown in 2008. (Justin Sullivan / Getty Images)

The owner and two workers at an Inland Empire trucking company operated a conspiracy to make illegal repairs on gasoline tanker trucks, a dangerous scheme that caused a fatal explosion, a federal grand jury charged.

The indictment, filed Wednesday, charges owner Carl Johansson, shop manager Enrique Garcia and safety manager Donald Spicer. It alleges they also obstructed the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Johansson's Corona-based company National Distribution Services Inc. was also charged, as was another firm, Quality Services, the U.S. attorney's office said in a news release.

Mark Werksman, an attorney for Johansson, said his client denies all charges, including that he was the owner of National Distribution Services. Werksman declined to say what role his client had in the company.

"Mr. Johansson absolutely denies that he is responsible for this horrible accident or that he could have done anything to prevent it," Werksman said.

Attorneys for Spicer and Garcia did not immediately return emails seeking comment.

The indictment alleges that Johansson set up Quality Services so he could continue operating after the government ordered National Distribution Services to put roughly 40 gasoline and ethanol tanks out of service because it found they were a safety risk.

The transportation department was investigating National Distribution Services after a May 2014 explosion killed one welder and severely injured another, the U.S. attorney's office said in a news release.

According to the indictment, Johansson and Garcia talked about having two workers perform

The welding project then caused the fatal explosion, the indictment says.

According to court records, in the early 1990s, Johansson was owner of another company, Atlas Carrier Inc., when a welder was killed in an explosion while the worker performed tank repair work that Atlas was unlicensed to do. Johansson was indicted in that case as well. He was sentenced to 15 months in prison.

When investigators arrived to inquire about the most recent explosion at National Distribution Services, Johansson lied, the indictment alleges, telling investigators he was a customer service representative with a different company and that the welders were employed by an outside repair firm.

After the federal government prohibited National Distribution Services from operating dozens of tanks, Johansson kept doing so and set up Quality Services, according to the indictment.

Spicer, the safety manager, filed documents to obscure the fact that Quality Services was really just a new name for National Distribution Services, the indictment says.

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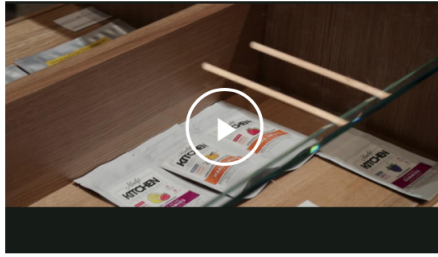
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Andrew Khouri covers the housing market for the Los Angeles Times. Before coming to The Times he wrote about commercial real estate for the San Fernando Valley Business Journal. He holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and graduated from the University of San Diego with a degree in history.

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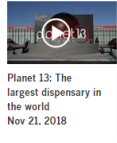


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