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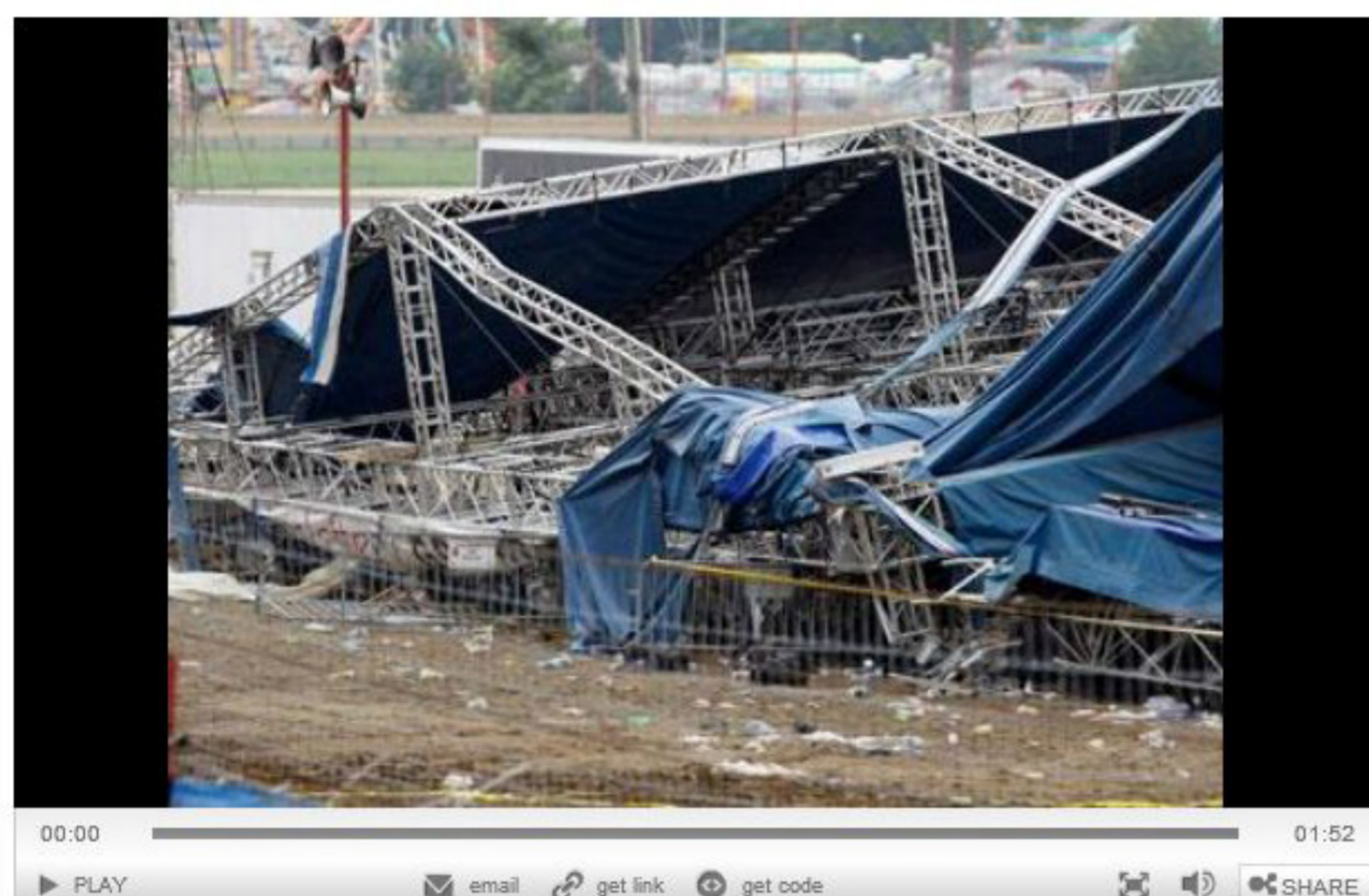
First lawsuits filed in stage collapse at Indiana State Fair

By Donna Leinwand Leger, USA TODAY

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The daughter and the life partner of a woman killed last Saturday in the stage collapse at the Indiana State Fair sued the company that built the stage and the organizers of the event for negligence.



Darron Cummings, AP

Investigators examine the stage that collapsed on Saturday at the Indiana State Fair.

The lawsuits, filed Friday, are the first stemming from the tragedy. Also Friday, a sixth person died from injuries suffered when the stage collapsed as a severe storm struck the fairgrounds on Aug. 13, minutes before the country duo Sugarland was to perform.

Tammy VanDam, 42, and Beth Urschel, 49, had traveled three hours from Wanatah, Ind., to celebrate VanDam's birthday at the concert. Urschel survived the collapse, but suffered a broken clavicle and had to have a severed toe reattached. VanDam was killed.

BLOG: [Sugarland returns to the stage after tragedy](#)

Urschel's lawsuit will challenge the Indiana law that prevents life partners from recovering damages in wrongful death cases, said attorney Kenneth J. Allen, of Valparaiso. A separate lawsuit was filed on behalf of VanDam's 17-year-old daughter Courtney.

"This has been described by the people responsible as an unpredictable fluke, but the facts prove otherwise," Allen said. "We think it was very preventable."

Event organizers received several early warnings about the bad weather, but did not cancel the concert, Allen said. "You had inaction in the face of imminent danger," he said.

Mid-America Sound Corporation, which constructed the stage, did not respond to a request comment left with their public relations firm. The Indiana attorney general's office would review the suit and file a response, said spokesman Bryan Corbin.

The lawsuit also asks for a temporary injunction that would forbid the state from removing the wreckage until it can be preserved as evidence in the lawsuits.

The stage collapse claimed its sixth victim when Jennifer Haskell, 22, died Friday morning at a hospital in Indianapolis, her family said in a statement.

Four people died on the scene. Among them was Haskell's best friend, 23-year-old Alina Bigjohny of Fort Wayne, who had been hired to teach English at a middle school in Muncie. The others were VanDam; Glenn Goodrich, 49, of Indianapolis, who worked for an underwater camera and lighting equipment company; and Christina Santiago, 29, of Chicago, a gay activist and program manager for a Chicago nonprofit. Stagehand Nathan Byrd, 51, of Indianapolis, who was atop the rigging when it fell, died from his injuries overnight. Dozens of people were injured.

Haskell, of Muncie, was a senior majoring in exercise science at Ball State University, the school's president Jo Ann Gora said. She also worked as a student landscaper on a campus beautification program.

"Jenny was a dedicated student both in and out of the classroom," Gora said. "She took deep pride in her contributions to the campus. And as a passionate Cardinal, she loved cheering for the women's basketball team."

Contributing: The Associated Press

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