

Jackie Lacey

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bumble Bee Foods, Two Others Charged in Death of Employee Trapped Inside Industrial Oven

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today announced that Bumble Bee Foods LLC and two others were charged with willfully violating worker safety rules, allegedly causing the 2012 death of an employee who became trapped inside an industrial oven at the company's Santa Fe Springs plant.

"We take worker safety very seriously," District Attorney Lacey said. "For the past year, prosecutors and investigators from my office have begun rolling out to major industrial incidents involving serious worker injuries and death. Our goal is to enhance the criminal prosecution of workplace safety violations. Although the Bumble Bee investigation began in 2012, this case represents our commitment to protecting workers from illegal – and, potentially, deadly – on-the-job practices."

Bumble Bee's former Safety Manager Saul Florez (dob 3/7/73), the company's Director of Plant Operations Angel Rodriguez (dob 1/30/52), and Bumble Bee Foods LLC were charged in case BA435950 with three felony counts each of an Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) violation causing death.

The defendants are expected to be arraigned on May 27 in Department 30 of the Foltz Criminal Justice Center. The case will be prosecuted by Hoon Chun, assistant head deputy of the Consumer Protection Division, and Deputy District Attorney Christopher Curtis of the Environmental Crimes/OSHA Section.

Prosecutors said on Oct. 11, 2012, victim Jose Melena, 62, of Wilmington, entered a 35-foot-long cylindrical oven as part of his job duties at Bumble Bee's Santa Fe Springs plant. The oven is used to sterilize cans of tuna.

Coworkers were unaware that Melena was inside the oven when they loaded multiple carts, collectively containing about 12,000 pounds of tuna, closed the front door and started the oven. The victim inadvertently became trapped in the back of the super-heated, pressurized steam cooker.

During the two-hour heat sterilization process, the oven's internal temperature rose to about 270 degrees. Melena's severely burned remains were discovered by a coworker, prosecutors said. Melena worked for the company for about six years.

If convicted as charged, Florez of Whittier and Rodriguez of Riverside face a maximum sentence of three years in state prison and/or a \$250,000 fine. San Diego-based Bumble Bee Foods faces a maximum fine of \$1.5 million.

The case remains under investigation by the Cal/OSHA Bureau of Criminal Investigations.

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About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Last year, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecuted more than 71,000 felony defendants and nearly 112,000 misdemeanor defendants.