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## Lamar County jury rejects \$19M lawsuit

By *BEN PIPER*

PURVIS - An eight-week trial against two Texas oil companies ended Friday in what officials believe is one of the longest trials ever in Lamar County.

Circuit Clerk Leslie Wilson said he could not think of any trial lasting longer than the suit between Tellus Operating Group of Mississippi and Texas Petroleum Investment Co.

Tellus Operating Group claimed in a lawsuit filed in 2004 that gas coming from an earlier casing leak from a Lamar County field had allowed Total Gas and Chemicals and Texas Petroleum Investment Company to wrongfully take gas from Tellus after it had purchased the well.

Total Gas and Chemicals owned the well from 1991 to 1995, according to defense attorney Jeff Reynolds.

Tellus Operating Group sought \$19 million in damages. But the Lamar County jury voted 11-1 to reject the claim.

"After this long trial, I was ecstatic and the reason is that Tellus had been saying the whole time that the oil field workers were lying and even accused my client of lying," Reynolds said Friday. "So it was an extremely serious allegation, and we feel totally vindicated of the false allegations made of my client," Reynolds said.

Texas Petroleum attorney Adam Schiffer said jurors accurately understood how the casing leak that did once exist was not relevant to the suit.

"We successfully argued that any gas in the shallow zones of the well had been exhausted many years before either defendant purchased the well," he said. "Jurors saw that the plaintiff's case was a house of cards that crumbled under the weight of the evidence."

Circuit Judge Prentiss Harrell, who presided over the case, was not available to comment on the two-month trial.

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