

Jury awards \$17,500 to fireman arrested at scene of accident

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Hazelwood — Federal court jurors awarded \$17,500 on Wednesday to a fire captain arrested by a Hazelwood police officer in a dispute over where a firetruck was parked during a 2003 car crash rescue.

Juror Betsy Vennemann said after the verdict, "We wanted to make a statement that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated."

Capt. David Wilson won \$7,500 in compensatory damages and \$10,000 in punitive damages. Jurors, including a nun, said they went easy on the defendant, Officer Todd Greeves, because he has a family and they weren't sure who would pay the bill.

Wilson testified that the Robertson Fire Protection District truck was parked in a way to protect rescuers working to free a victim from wreckage along Interstate 270 at McDonnell Boulevard.

Greeves ordered that the truck be moved to accommodate passing traffic and arrested Wilson for ignoring him. Wilson was released after 23 minutes and never charged. He sued, claiming civil rights violations that opened him to anxiety and humiliation.

Greeves told the court the truck was creating a hazard and not adding to safety at the scene.

Jurors interviewed after the verdict said their feeling about Greeves was reinforced during the punitive phase of the trial, when they heard there had been other complaints about him. An internal affairs investigation determined that Greeves used excessive force in a 2002 arrest, court documents show, and was the subject of several other complaints.

Before Wednesday's deliberations, U.S. Magistrate Judge Mary Ann Medler had already ruled that Greeves had no probable cause to arrest Wilson, who she said had state law on his side. She also dismissed the city of Hazelwood as a defendant.

"The whole police and fire communities have been watching this case," said Bevis Schock, one of Wilson's lawyers. "Everybody wanted to know who controls the fire scene."

Greeves' lawyer, Peter Dunne, said he was disappointed in the verdict and the discussion of the other complaints against Greeves. Dunne also said it was unfair to suggest that Greeves did not care about the firefighters' safety.

Dunne said that the city's insurance would not pay for the costs and that the issue is "complicated." Schock said he thinks the insurance probably would pay the compensatory damages, and possibly the punitive. Also at issue is payment of unspecified lawyers' fees.

Spokespersons for the fire district and Hazelwood police could not be reached for comment Wednesday.