

# Lawsuit Filed On Behalf Of 20 Victims Who Suffered Burns From Manholes In Detroit

A 6-year-old boy suffered severe burns when he was leaving a museum.



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Photo: Ron Dewey / WWJ

**DETROIT (WWJ)** -- A lawsuit has been filed on behalf of 20 victims who say they all suffered severe burns, caused by steam emitted from manhole covers in Downtown Detroit and the surrounding area.

The lawsuit, filed by Buckfire & Buckfire Law Firm, names Detroit Thermal, LLC, Detroit Renewable Energy, LLC and Project Mist HoldCo, LLC as defendants. Detroit Thermal is the company that serves commercial and industrial customers in downtown Detroit,

providing heating and cooling to more than 100 buildings in the area through an underground network.

Project Mist HoldCo is a New York-based company that purchased Detroit Renewable Energy, which is the parent company of Detroit Thermal.

Complaints against the defendants date all the way back to 2012, with many burns suffered when walking across manhole covers that were emitting steam. The lawsuit says the companies do not adequately warn of the dangers of the hot steam.

Four minors were named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit, including 6-year-old Caleb Tahmouch of Farmington Hills, who suffered burns to his legs while walking over a manhole cover as he left the Detroit Science Center, located near Warren Avenue in Midtown Detroit.

"We had never heard about anybody getting burned by them or anything like that," his mother, Sarah Tahmouch, said. "He thought it was a cool thing and walked across it because we didn't know any better. And it went up his pant leg and burned him severely."

Tahmouch and other victims spoke to members of the media at Buckfire Law's offices in Southfield on Tuesday. The victims shared graphic photos of the burn injuries to their feet and legs.

Several victims' injuries occurred in the areas near Ford Field and Comerica Park in the heart of downtown. At least eight other incidents occurred in the area south of Greektown Casino, with several of them occurring near the same intersection -- Lafayette and Beaubien Streets.

Brandon Dumas of Detroit fell on a manhole cover during a motorcycle crash last summer near the intersection of Cass Avenue and Grand Boulevard. Dumas suffered second-degree burns to his left leg and had quite the mark to show for it.

"My right leg, I guess for a lack of better term, was branded by the manhole cover. I have a partial 'E' and a partial 'W' on my calf from the manhole cover," Dumas said.

Robert Lantzy, an attorney for the victims, says the companies "have failed to warn people about the dangers associated with the steam and failed to take action to properly maintain their system." Lantzy says the companies have attempted to fix some problem spots by covering the manholes with pipes.

"I know everyone has seen them, it's the orange and white steam pipes or chimneys that they've been setting over these manhole covers and it's just been an inadequate way to protect these victims," Lantzy said.

Detroit Thermal tells WWJ they will not comment on ongoing litigation, but said in a statement they are "working to deliver safer, more efficient service" and "strive, more than anything to be a good neighbor."

The lawsuit is a minimum of \$25,000, plus interest, costs and attorney's fees for each of the 20 plaintiffs, citing medical expenses, emotional distress and damages for loss of enjoyment of life, among other damages.