

WHEN THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENS – SPINAL CORD INJURIES

PART 2

More than 450,000 Americans live with a spinal cord injury. Statistically, young males are more likely to suffer such an injury. (In fact, over 80% of spinal cord injuries happen to males between the ages of 16 and 30.) Approximately 10,000 new spinal cord injuries occur every year. Many of these injuries are caused by the negligent conduct of others. If you are the victim of a spinal cord injury, there is an 85% chance that you will live at least 10 years after the injury.

A spinal cord injury can be linked to several different causes. Some spinal cord injuries are the result of a disease or a birth defect, such as polio or spina bifida. Medical mistakes and medical malpractice can also cause spinal cord injuries. However, most spinal cord injuries are caused by a physical trauma, such as a fall or a car accident. In fact, 36% of these injuries are the result of a motor vehicle accident.

In some cases, the trauma that causes the injury is the result of someone's negligence. For example, if a big-rig truck driver falls asleep and runs into your car and you suffer a spinal cord injury, that truck driver *and* the trucking company could be liable to pay you damages for your injuries. Damages include the medical costs that will be incurred over the lifetime of the victim, but may also include past and future lost wages, loss of enjoyment of life, emotional damage, and pain and suffering. If you are the primary wage-earner in your home, or the primary caregiver for your young children, the driver and company may also be liable for your family's loss of your financial support, or their loss of your care and comfort (known as "loss of consortium").

Sometimes it takes the involvement of a personal injury attorney to obtain the full settlement to which you may be entitled if you are seriously injured, as with a spinal cord injury. Frequently, "soft damages" like emotional distress, pain and suffering, or loss of consortium are more difficult to prove, and you may need the help of experts to demonstrate these types of damages. Additionally, you may receive a larger settlement overall when your attorney discovers, analyzes and presents all the relevant information in a way that compels the negligent

party(ies) to consider *all* your damages.

Dealing with the tragedy of a spinal cord injury would be difficult enough for you and your family. An attorney could make it a little easier by taking off some of the pressure of dealing with the negligent party(ies) or their insurance company(ies), and working to get you a fair settlement.

R. Michael Shickich is the founder of the Injury Law Firm located in Casper. The focus of his practice is personal injury and wrongful death cases.

The Wyoming State Bar does not certify any lawyer as a specialist or expert. Anyone considering a lawyer should independently investigate the lawyer's credentials and ability, and not rely upon advertisements or self-proclaimed expertise.