

Trucker guilty in smuggling deaths

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Body

HOUSTON — A Texas jury Monday convicted a truck driver on all 58 counts against him for his role in the **deaths** of 19 people during a bungled human **smuggling** attempt.

Tyrone Williams, 35, faces a possible **death** sentence or life in prison. The punishment phase of the trial will start Wednesday and is expected to last about a week.

Williams stared ahead and showed no emotion when the verdict was read but later hugged his lawyer, Craig Washington, before being led away by U.S. Marshals.

Prosecutors declined to comment but told U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal they expect to call about 25 witnesses during the sentencing trial.

In May 2003, Williams hauled more than 70 immigrants in a trailer from south Texas to a truck stop near Houston. As temperatures inside the trailer rose, the increasingly desperate riders peeled off their clothes, punched out taillights for air and shouted for help.

By the time Williams opened the door about 3½ hours later, 17 people had died of dehydration, overheating or suffocation. Two others died later.

Williams abandoned the trailer at a truck stop and fled to Houston, 100 miles away. He was arrested after walking into a hospital complaining of anxiety.

During the trial, the jury of seven women and five men watched as grieving family members from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic identified their relatives from grisly photos. One showed a 5-year-old boy who had died in the arms of his father.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Rodriguez told jurors Williams was a "vile and heartless truck driver" who ignored the suffering of the riders. Williams' lawyers said he didn't know how many people were packed into his trailer and didn't understand their cries for help, which were made in Spanish.

Williams' first trial ended in a hung jury in March 2005.

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