

WHY WE NEED THE CIVIL JUSTICE SYSTEM: THE ENVIRONMENT

Dirty Air

More than 50 million U.S. residents live with unhealthy air. Even after Congress passed the Clean Air Act, corporations continue to pollute the air we breathe with chemicals and carcinogens from arsenic to zinc. In the face of weak federal enforcement, it has been trial attorneys who have led the fight, seeking justice against all the odds for communities such as the cancer-ridden town of Globeville, poisoned by the cadmium-spewing smelter that rose above it for 100 years.

Poisoning the Poor

For decades, corporations handling waste disposal and hazardous materials have targeted low-income communities as locations for processing plants, dumps and landfills. State and federal agencies were of no help, routinely allowing permits for sites in economically vulnerable communities without any oversight. Trial attorneys have worked on behalf of targeted communities, such as Camden, New Jersey, which was forced to accept an industrial plant producing over a millions tons of hazardous waste a year in a neighborhood already marked by 15 contaminated sites. Trial attorneys were successful on behalf of Camden and continue to stand up on behalf of many other similar communities.

Oil Spills

Between 1970 and 2000, incidents such as the Exxon Valdez disaster spilled more than 3 billion gallons of oil into marine waters worldwide. Trial attorneys worked for two decades to force Exxon to clean up its mess, and have proven to be the best mechanism for holding corporate polluters accountable.

Contaminated Water

As many as 49 million Americans have water supplies that contain levels of arsenic, radioactive substances and coliform bacteria that violate the Safe Drinking Water Act. Trial attorneys were the first to take action in the 1970s, holding Velsicol Corp. accountable in Tennessee for contaminating drinking water with 300,000 barrels of chemical waste. While federal agencies pursue only three percent of the more than 23,000 companies that violate federal law by contaminating rivers, streams and groundwater sources, it continues to be trial attorneys who offer the best protection of America's water supply.

Chemical Dumping

U.S. corporations produce more than 25 billion pounds of hazardous waste every year, nearly half a billion pounds of which are so toxic that they do not break down in the environment. In cases such as Love Canal, Hooker Chemical Co. dumped 20,000 tons of chemical waste in an unlined canal and then sold the land to the local school board. Time and again, it has been trial attorneys who have worked to stop corporations from dumping toxic waste and held them accountable for the injuries they have caused.