

# Choosing an Environmental Lawyer

By Kimberly Genné

**E**nvironmental law is a very specialized field with its own vocabulary and regulations. "It's no different from other law specialties. The ultimate goal is to have clients do what is required by law without getting into trouble," says **Donald Bach**, partner at **DeWitt Ross & Stevens**.

Environmental lawyers don't typically sue; they negotiate on behalf of their client. Litigation is rare and often a last resort.

"The two big reasons to seek an environmental law attorney are to defend yourself and to defend your interests," says **Steve Hiniker**, executive director of **1000 Friends of Wisconsin**. "Figure out what you want and need to know and why you are seeking a lawyer."

Companies should seek professional legal consultation in regards to environmental situations specific to their business. This may include obtaining permits for projects that may have an impact on the environment such as land use, zoning, wetlands and air emissions. "Regulations exist at the local and state levels

and businesses need to comply," says **Carl Sinderbrand**, partner at **Axley Brynelson**.

Legal expertise may also be needed in situations where businesses may have violated a regulation or compliance issue. "Ignoring regulations can be very painful — time, forfeitures, loss of credibility, monetary fines, etc.," says Bach.

For small businesses seeking environmental law attorneys or consultants, check with trade associations, talk to regulators or contact an environmental group. "You want to pick a lawyer who has experience dealing with the issue(s) that you may be dealing with," says Bach.

Adds Hiniker: "Developing relationships with environmental groups can assist a business in advocating for causes with allied interests."

When choosing an environmental law attorney, says **Linda Bochert**, partner at **Michael Best & Friedrich**, look for one whose interests are aligned with your business, whose personality is representative of your business' stance, who's experienced and

who knows the process and personnel.

Experienced environmental attorneys will already have established relationships with the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Justice and will be familiar with Environmental Protection Agency standards. "There are special procedures when challenging a state agency and you want someone who is familiar with those procedures," says Bochert.

Not only is it helpful to have an environmental law attorney who is well-versed in the vocabulary and regulations, but also one who is familiar with the technical side of your business as well.

"It helps in the communication with both engineers and the construction crew. We act as a mediator and make sure the client understands what is happening every step of the way," says **Charles "Buck" Sweeney**, partner at **Axley Brynelson**.

"Lawyers are commendable for their documenting and record-keeping process. When dealing with environmental issues, it is helpful to have the entire process documented," he adds.

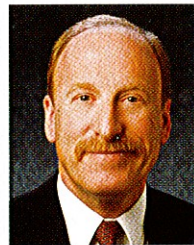
Dealing with environmental law does not have to be a painful process for businesses. "It can be a win-win situation if you have the right team," says Sinderbrand.



**Donald Bach**  
DeWitt Ross & Stevens



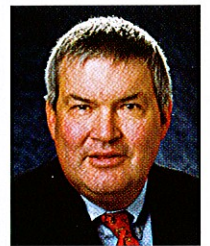
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