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## They've Got Next: Environmental Law Fresh Face Yardena Zwang-Weissman

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Name: Yardena Zwang-Weissman

Firm: Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

Claim to Fame: Assisted a trial team representing International Paper in its zero-liability win against Harris County, Tex., which sought \$1.5 billion in penalties for state environmental law violations.

Location: Los Angeles

Age: 39

Yardena Zwang-Weissman, a partner at Morgan Lewis, got an early taste of the complexities of environmental law while working on a team that helped International Paper Co. avoid a potential \$1.5 billion penalty for dioxin releases in [Harris County v. Int'l Paper Co.](#)

The client's predecessor-in-interest was accused by Harris County, Tex., in 2011 of improperly disposing of paper mill waste containing dioxin into the San Jacinto River, and never acting to prevent waste from going into the river.

Harris County sought more than \$3 billion in penalties, including \$1.5 billion each from defendants International Paper and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp. for the alleged violation of Texas environmental laws. International Paper's predecessor operated a paper mill in the 1960s and contracted with McGinnes, through that company's predecessor, to remove waste from the site and deposit it in pits alongside a river.

McGinnes reached a settlement with the county — \$29.2 million, according to the [Houston Business Journal](#) — after a six-week trial right before the case was submitted to the jury. International Paper remained as the sole defendant and the jury ultimately rejected Harris County's arguments in 2014 and found the company wasn't liable for the discharge of waste.

Zwang-Weissman, then an associate, assisted Morgan Lewis litigation partners Craig Stanfield and David Levy who supported the trial team leaders on the case, partners Winn Carter and David Schrader. She was responsible for preparing and managing expert discovery and trial preparation, among other aspects of the case.

The team "worked together seamlessly" to get that result. "It was a very proud moment," she said.

Morgan Lewis partner David Schrader has worked with Zwang-Weissman over the past 15 years. He said she is "relentless" in the best sense of the word, and she "will not stop until she finds the answer."

"I have said many times, only half-jokingly, that I will never go to trial without Yardena again," he said.

Zwang-Weissman studied at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law and worked as a summer associate at Morgan Lewis. She now serves as deputy practice group leader for Morgan Lewis's product liability, mass tort, and insurance practice, and is the "youngest partner to hold such a leadership role at the firm," according to the firm.

Her work involves everything from new developments in science, nature, and technology, and the effects of emerging chemicals.

Zwang-Weissman has tackled other cases since the International Paper win involving the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act and the California Hazardous Substance Account Act.

She played a key role defending Southern California Gas Co. and Sempra Energy in cases that arose starting in 2015 after the Aliso Canyon natural gas leak was discovered in the Los Angeles area.

The cases involved multiple regulatory governmental enforcement actions and complex expert testimony, according to Zwang-Weissman. Each proceeding involved an “intense balance of attention,” she said.

“It’s the multi-faced nature of this work that keeps it interesting, and it’s important to finding solutions for our clients,” she said. The Southern California Gas dispute is ongoing.

She is fortunate to be able to rely on good teams, and one of her favorite aspects of the job is being able to mentor more junior attorneys.

“No one person does this all by themselves,” she said.

“I was the very lucky recipient of strong mentorship and partners who looked out for me,” Zwang-Weissman continued. “I spent a lot of time and effort and care very much about paying that forward.”

As a mother to a young son, she is especially passionate about mentoring women attorneys, she said. She co-chairs the Morgan Lewis Parent Lawyer Network and leads a networking group for women lawyers at the Los Angeles office.

“Issues especially about family and parenting both at work and beyond are very important to me,” she said.

She strongly urges other attorneys to “think about how everything we work on has a greater impact on everything else.”

“The real focus of these types of cases is working with our clients on the purpose, looking beyond the single issue, and managing the multiple components,” she said.

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