



LAW360

2014 Rising Star Jeffrey J. Zeiger

Kirkland & Ellis LLP's Jeffrey Zeiger's relatively young age didn't stop him from hitting a home run in the record-breaking \$5.15 billion battle between Tronox Inc., and Anadarko Petroleum Corp., over environmental liabilities, earning him a place on *Law360's* list of the top five young environmental attorneys.

Earlier this month, Anadarko agreed to pay \$5.15 billion to settle pollution claims with a litigation trust of Tronox — a client of the 2014 Rising Star — which emerged from bankruptcy in 2011 and accused Anadarko subsidiary Kerr-McGee Corp., of dumping environmental liabilities on the company as part of a fraudulent transfer scheme.

The 39-year-old Zeiger handled the environmental portion of the case, logging more than 7,000 hours between 2008 and 2014 while completing a liability assessment, interviewing key individuals from coast to coast, and crafting arguments for one of the most difficult aspects of the litigation.

Lead trial counsel David Zott said he wasn't phased at all by Zeiger's age, and neither were Kirkland's clients or the U.S. Department of Justice, which was also involved in the matter.

"My experience with him, almost since the day he arrived at the firm, is that he's a uniquely capable lawyer. I had no question that he could handle the Tronox trial," Zott said.

Zeiger said he gained experience in environmental litigation having previously handled matters for specialty chemicals manufacturer Solutia Inc. But the Tronox case presented him with a daunting problem he'd never faced before: the task of quantifying the likely future expenditures for the various polluted sites, which Kerr-McGee had never done.

Eventually Zeiger and his team came up with a list of about 2,700 sites

where potential liabilities existed, either based on Kerr-McGee's ownership, its status as a corporate successor, or its history of disposing waste at the location. They narrowed it down to 372 sites, but even that was a huge project, Zeiger said. The resulting analysis was about 2,100 pages long, and Anadarko came up with its own 8,000-page report.

"It was a very steep learning curve. It was almost like building up a trial type case for each of the 372 environmental sites. It was a massive undertaking," he said.

From meetings with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials in San Francisco and Navajo

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Nation representatives in Window Rock, Ariz., as well as a trip to a one-stoplight town in Mississippi, Zeiger crisscrossed the nation to gather facts from former employees and other people with knowledge of the matter, he said.

From those meetings, he said, he got a sense of some of the stakes in the case, particularly in the Navajo Nation, where neglected pollution was a huge concern.

to do the environmental remediation that is so desperately needed and has been delayed for decades given Kerr-McGee's approach to environmental liabilities."

Despite the case's difficulty, Zeiger said, it needed to have been brought because of the potentially far-reaching impacts. And he said if he can find another case like this one, he'd pursue it as well.

compared to when I started. So even though I'm young, it wasn't the first time I've been at the hot podium, although it was by far the highest stakes case that I've ever tried," he said.

Zott called Zeiger the "entire package," because of his strategic and organizational skills.

"He's great at developing facts, an excellent oral advocate, excellent brief writer, and he also does a wonderful job with clients. So there's really not a weakness in his game," Zott said. "If I were in trouble and needed a really great lawyer, he'd be at the top of who I'd pick. He's really got a great future ahead of him."

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"I think this decision and the subsequent settlement will have a positive impact on communities across the country, and on the Navajo Nation for generations," he said. "We have obtained a settlement that, even though there's uncertainty around some of the sites, should be sufficient to allow each of those communities

Kirkland allowed Zeiger the opportunity to develop his skills early in his career, he said, by giving him a lot of responsibility since he began working there.

"And I've had a number of trials, which are becoming harder and harder to find these days, even

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