Environmental Lawyer Encyclopedia Article

Environmental Lawyer

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Environmental Lawyer

The field of environmental law began after World War II (1939-1945) as a response to growing public concern about the impact of the massive amounts of toxic chemicals used in the fields of agriculture and public health. American biologist Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which served as both a warning about the dangers of unregulated pesticide use and a reminder that human health is inextricably linked to the health of the planet, mobilized people around the world. The first lawyers to work with this growing "environmental" movement helped grassroots organizations investigate chemical claims and lobby for laws to regulate the proliferation of poisons flushed into the water and air and dumped by the planeload over farmland. Thanks to public pressure, the U.S. government in 1970 created the Environmental Protection Agency, charging it with enforcing environmental protection of land, air, water, and other species.

Environmental lawyers choose from three broad areas in which to work. Many enter government agencies, writing laws and enforcing them, investigating violations, and prosecuting the violators. Many other lawyers choose to work for industry helping companies to understand and comply with the changing laws, permits, and regulations. These lawyers also defend their clients in violation lawsuits and help them to lobby for decreased regulations. The smallest group of environmental lawyers is composed of those who work as public advocates for citizen's groups, from the local to the international level. These lawyers describe their work as the least well paid yet the most rewarding in allowing them to use their career to pursue their ideals, whether they are protecting neighborhoods, clean air and water, wilderness, or other species.

The requirements for becoming an environmental lawyer are the same as for any law degree. A candidate with a bachelor's or master's degree applies to a three-year law program with a set curriculum. Elective courses could include studying the Clean Air Act, Superfund cleanup laws, or the laws governing mineral resources. Although not a requirement, a background in ecology, biology, chemistry, or engineering helps lawyers understand complicated pollution questions. The most important quality to bring to environmental law is a reverence for life and an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings.

Bibliography

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