

Identifying **10** Leading Insurance Attorneys

By Tania Anderson

Not many of today's insurance lawyers say they dreamed of being an insurance lawyer. The field was not hot or sexy or cutting-edge. Most law schools in the 1970s and early 1980s didn't even offer insurance-law classes. So they got their start because one day a partner in the firm asked them to do some research. Or they sensed the potential when asbestos cases started rising to the surface.

They were lured in reluctantly, but they stayed because of the intellectual challenge. Today, they can navigate the complicated ins and outs of insurance policies—the paragraph or sentence or word that means the difference between coverage or not.

The following 10 lawyers have handled



some of the highest-profile insurance cases in the last 25 years, concerning everything from the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill and faulty breast implants to the 9/11 attacks and, of course, asbestos exposure. They counsel corporate policyholders and defend insurance companies. And whether or not the word "insurance" makes your heart beat faster, they play a key role in some of the most complex disputes of our time.

Leading LAWYERS

Ten of the D.C. Area's Top Insurance Attorneys

Mitchell Dolin

Covington & Burling

Ask just about anyone to name one of the biggest environmental disasters in U.S. history, and the *Exxon Valdez* spill of 1989 will likely be their answer. Mitchell Dolin, a partner at Covington & Burling, was part of the team that landed the insurance coverage case in 1991.

"It was not only high stakes, but it was one of a kind," says Dolin of the case, which resulted in a \$780 million insurance check for the oil company. "There was an incredible factual canvas against which the case played out."

The *Exxon Valdez* matter is just one of several high-profile cases that have landed on Dolin's desk since he started focusing on representing policyholders in the early 1980s. He has counseled the National Football League in connection with coverage for rescheduled games after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina. He negotiated a settlement for former President Bill Clinton over personal insurance policies implicated by the Paula Jones lawsuit. And he was chosen by Owens Corning, the glass-fiber materials maker, to take the lead in asbestos bodily injury litigation in 1989, months before he made partner at Covington. Since then, he's been lead counsel for Owens Corning in a series of matters leading to recoveries of almost \$1.5 billion.

Like most insurance lawyers today, Dolin, 50, didn't go to law school to represent corporate policyholders in disputes with insurance companies. He started at Covington in 1982 after working as a summer associate at the D.C. firm and then clerking for Judge Charles Clark at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit. His early workload was half antitrust and half insurance. But he soon concluded that the insurance disputes were much more appealing.

"In antitrust cases, I learned what it was like representing one company among a dozen," Dolin recalls. "It always appeared that the people representing the plaintiffs [in coverage disputes] had more fun."

At the same time that Dolin was growing more interested in insurance, the practice area started heating up with asbestos and environmental claims. Covington was one of the first law firms in Washington focused on insurance law thanks to Robert Sayler, who founded the practice group 30 years ago. (Sayler is now senior counsel at the firm.)

Sayler and Dolin were hired together on the *Exxon Valdez* case, in which the company was seeking payment from its insurance company for damages related to the oil spill in Prince William Sound, off the coast of Alaska. Sayler brought along Dolin, an "unassuming" junior partner at the



time, says Charles Beach, coordinator of corporate litigation for Exxon Mobil Corp. But after a short time Sayler was pulled away on another case, and Dolin was left to manage Covington's work.

"We became a dream team because of people like Dolin," Beach says. "Mitchell basically taught all of us what we had to know."

Covington's 70-attorney policyholder practice is still dominant in the industry. Among Dolin's partners, William Greaney and William Skinner have notably won the trust of many clients. Greaney is cited for his handling of several asbestos cases. And Skinner represented American Express in settlements for property damage and business interruption claims related to 9/11.