

0. SEVENTY-SEVEN PLAINTIFFS SUE - Story Preface

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It isn't easy to uncover the truth about contaminated groundwater. No one from the polluting company is going to hand over documents containing proof of what happened. In a busy law firm, people are managing day-to-day issues on pending cases. The thought of starting a massive contamination case can be a daunting prospect.

Law firms taking on such claims have to be dedicated and willing to front enormous amounts of money to uncover the smoking guns. People in the firm must be willing to give years of their lives to the case. Those same people also know they will probably experience "withdrawal" when the case is over - even if they win. It's sometimes hard to walk away from a big case that has been the main focus of a person's professional life.

Erin Brockovich and her boss, Ed Masry, rose to the occasion. (Follow these links to see the real people, not the actors.) When 77 initial plaintiffs filed their lawsuit against PG&E in 1993, it was the direct result of a monstrous effort by this dedicated legal team. People who drank polluted water, and breathed contaminated air, wanted answers.

As Walter Lack, whose firm took over lead responsibilities for the litigation, told the trial judge on January 4, 1994:

They want to know the truth. That's really what they want in this lawsuit because they are dying, some of them. They want to know what was done to them as they grew up and raised their families.

(P. 16/17 of court transcript)

Some of the plaintiffs were upset because they believed PG&E did not respect them. As one of the plaintiffs told the Fox Reporter during the May 24, 1994 news report:

They thought they were dealing with a bunch of dumb hicks, that's what I think.

It takes little more than a belief like that to spur a group of injured people into action.

Except, as PG&E claimed, not all the people were injured. It was one thing for PG&E to acknowledge its chrome 6 had contaminated the property around the compressor station. It was quite something else to agree the contamination had caused actual harm.

Fear of harm - like fear of cancer - is not an injury. At least it wasn't before this case. (*Anderson, et al v Pacific Gas & Electric* - San Bernardino Superior Court file BCV 00300).

And plaintiffs' settlement demand was hard for PG&E to comprehend: \$250 million. Even the trial judge called it

...a rather shocking sort of an offer.

Turns out, PG&E would have saved a huge amount of money on settlement and defense costs had they accepted the plaintiffs' demand early in the case.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SEVENTY-SEVEN-PLAINTIFFS-SUE-Erin-Brockovich)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

Media Stream

Erin Brockovich



Erin Brockovich

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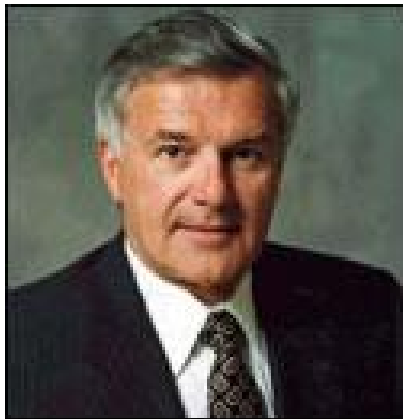
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Ed Masry

Image online courtesy, The Law Offices of Masry & Vititoe website.

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Walter Lack

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