

The 10 Mightiest Product Liability Practice Groups

By **Sindhu Sundar**

Law360, New York (November 17, 2015, 8:59 PM ET) -- The 10 law firms with the largest product liability practices in the country include midsize firms for which the practice is an essential part of their identity, as well as large firms adapting to handle the increasingly international nature of lawsuits and government investigations stemming from high-profile product defects and recalls.

PRODUCT LIABILITY			
Rank	Firm	Product Liability Partners	Rank Change
1	Shook Hardy	134	↔
2	DLA Piper	108	↔
3	Bowman and Brooke	77	↔
4	Greenberg Traurig	75	↑
5	Wilson Elser	72	↑
6	Lewis Brisbois	70	↑
7	Dentons	66	↑
7	Reed Smith	66	↔
9	Cozen O'Connor	65	↑
10	Kirkland & Ellis	64	↔

Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP, which topped the list, DLA Piper, **Bowman and Brooke** LLP, Greenberg Traurig LLP and Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP were among those leading the Product Liability Law360 100, a ranking of the 100 law firms with the most partners practicing in product liability, according to data provided for the Law360 2015 Largest Practice Groups Report.

Most of the firms on this year's list were also on last year's list, but Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP, Dentons and Cozen O'Connor are newcomers this year. Attorneys from many of the firms on the list said their partner-staffing decisions stemmed from recent trends that have shaped product liability litigation, including the increasing litigation and enforcement exposure of manufacturers embroiled in international recalls.

"Global product liability actions are on the increase as product manufacturers go global," said Christopher Young, a co-chairman of DLA Piper's product liability and mass torts practice.

The emissions scandal dogging Volkswagen AG — which has sparked consumer suits in the U.S. and in Germany, criminal investigations in both countries and Spain, and enforcement actions around the world, including in Brazil — represents the kind of exposure that large manufacturers can start expecting for defective products shipped around the world, attorneys say.

"What law firms need to do is to get out ahead of those developments and identify people they have in-house in various jurisdictions," Young said. "So when the telephone rings, the answer is not, 'Let me look for people and get back to you,' but, 'Yes we've identified a team to help you, and that team is ready to go.'"

Wilson Elser, whose product liability practice is as old as the 37-year-old firm, has been expanding the group, most recently in Texas. It announced Nov. 10 that it added nine attorneys to its Houston office and opened a new one in Beaumont with two attorneys to be named partner in January 2016.

"We're always looking to expand all over the country when we have the opportunity," said Frank Manchisi, chairman of the firm's product liability practice.

The firm's practice continues to be active in areas that it has been historically engaged in, including litigation over a wide range of recreational products and industrial products including lathes, machine tools and punch presses. But the firm also has significant practices in major growth areas including pharmaceutical and food labeling litigation.

The firm's product liability practice envisions its future growth areas in litigation related to the so-called Internet of Things, which involves products that can be controlled remotely through software, making them potentially vulnerable to hacking and other security breaches.

"When we start to see new areas with potential liability ramifications, we get in on the ground floor, even when there may not be any cases to litigate yet," Manchisi said. "We research them and write about them and speak about them, giving lectures to audiences. So when the cases get started, when a risk manager for a company or a claims person for an insurer wants to know who's knowledgeable in this area, we've demonstrated that we are, through publications and lectures."

Shook Hardy boasts a partner team that tops the list, and it has recently added partners to offices in Philadelphia, Chicago and Seattle. But Eric Anielak, the managing partner for the firm's pharmaceutical and medical device litigation practice, says clients look not just for partner numbers but also for how many other attorneys below them they have for support.

"Companies are looking not only for expertise at the partner level but also for the depth below," he said. "They want partners with the experience and sophistication to handle mass torts but also resources in terms of associates and of counsel ranks and staff attorneys."

Paul Cereghini, the chairman of **Bowman and Brooke**, said international clients look to product liability defense partner ranks with their eye on an important consideration: whether they have the skill and technical expertise to defend a product.

"One of the things that is central in these international defect cases is defending the product," he said. "That core defense tends to be important to the client, no matter what the arena, in terms of defending the integrity of the product."

Methodology: Rankings are based on partner head count data from 283 U.S.-based law firms, including 197 of the largest 200 firms in the country. Data is as of Aug. 31. Only U.S.-based firms and vereins with a U.S. component were eligible for the rankings. Partners counted for a practice group in the rankings had to spend at least 50 percent of their time on matters related to that practice. For partners who split their time evenly between two different practice groups, firms were allowed to count those partners as "0.5" in each of the two practices.

To view last year's Product Liability Top 10, [click here](#).

--Editing by Jeremy Barker and Christine Chun.

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