

Top Law Firms Selected to Lead East Palestine Derailment Lawsuits



Norfolk Southern, a major railway company, is facing more than 30 lawsuits following a freight train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio in February of this year. The incident resulted in hazardous chemicals spilling and catching fire, leading residents and businesses to seek compensation for property damage, ongoing medical monitoring for the community, and punitive damages against the railroad company.

A coalition of national law firms has been chosen to lead the charge against Norfolk Southern. U.S. District Judge Benita Yalonda Pearson in Youngstown appointed New York-based Jayne Conroy of Simmons Hanly Conroy, Colorado-based Seth Katz of Burg Simpson Eldredge Hersh Jardine, and Delaware-based Elizabeth Graham of Grant & Eisenhofer as interim class counsel. Florida-based Michael Morgan of Morgan & Morgan will serve as co-lead counsel. Pearson chose the lawyers based on their significant work in identifying and investigating potential claims and their resources and experience in complex lawsuits.

The judge had been presented with two proposals for guiding the purported class action lawsuits. One plan proposed national class action firms taking the lead, while another emphasized attorneys with local roots. The judge ultimately chose the national firms to lead the litigation.

Norfolk Southern has not responded directly to the claims in court. Still, CEO Alan Shaw told lawmakers last month that the company is “committed” to addressing the impacts on home values, long-term health impacts, and potential effects on drinking water.

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Residents and businesses affected by the derailment seek compensation for property damage, ongoing medical monitoring for the community, and punitive damages against the railroad company. The law firms leading the litigation have pledged to uncover the reasons for the train derailment and how such deadly chemicals were allowed to contaminate the community.

Several more law firms will support the coalition in senior roles, including lawyers from national firms Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein and Motley Rice, as well as 20 Ohio-based attorneys. The Ohio-based attorneys are Jeffrey Goldenberg of Goldenberg Schneider, Ronald Parry of Strauss Troy, and Nils Johnson of Johnson & Johnson. They were initially vying to lead the cases alongside national class action firm Hagens Berman, which was not assigned a formal role on Wednesday. Hagens Berman attorney Kristen Johnson said in a statement Wednesday they are pleased members of their proposed team from other firms were appointed.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered Norfolk Southern in February to develop plans to address contamination and to pay back government agencies for cleanup costs. The agency’s action followed the derailment of the train and the release of hazardous chemicals into the environment.

The law firms leading the charge against Norfolk Southern have a strong record of representing clients in complex lawsuits. Simmons Hanly Conroy has recovered over \$10 billion on behalf of clients since its founding in 1999, while Burg Simpson Eldredge Hersh Jardine has secured over \$1 billion in verdicts, settlements, and judgments. Grant & Eisenhofer is known for its work in high-stakes securities litigation, and Morgan & Morgan has recovered billions of dollars on behalf of clients nationwide.

The lawsuits against Norfolk Southern will likely be closely watched as they progress. The outcome of the litigation could have far-reaching implications for the railroad industry and companies that transport hazardous materials. The case is also likely to highlight the need for companies to take steps to ensure their operations’ safety and minimize the risk of accidents that could harm people and the environment.