

INSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

by Isa Merritt

The Big Question: What is Environmental Law?

Environmental law is the field that encompasses those who regulate the environment and natural resources, private parties who wish to protect them, and those who wish to consume these resources. In other words, environmental law is a barrier between greedy, reckless human activity and the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. Since the times of industrialization and modernization people have been taking advantage of each other, the land, and its resources to extract everything they can get for money and power. Greed and capitalism not only affects human's lives, but every living being on Earth, as well as the Earth itself.

Environmental law serves to prevent this by providing protection, through being involved in issues such as water and climate change law. Not only does environmental law affect the rights and health of the Earth, but the rights and health of people. Inequality is entangled in almost every aspect of human life - environmental policy included. For example, the privatization of water being used as a weapon of oppression by supplying only certain groups with clean water, and the destruction of forests for fuel at the expense of the Natives that live off the forest. Environmental law can save lives. Environmental lawyers fight on all fronts, whether it be through advising federal agencies, working for non-profits, and working in private practices handling corporate regulations.

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What are some challenges of the field?

Environmental lawyers that are entangled with corporate and industry regulations play a major part in the defense of the planet. Big businesses contribute a vast amount to the expedition of climate change. They need to be strictly regulated because their hand in climate change will only grow and the damage they cause will only continue; however, this conflicts with interest. A large portion of possible business regulations that are associated with environmental friendliness do not align with the profit-maximizing mindset of businesses. Large businesses use fronts such as Corporate Social Responsibility. This is a measure to prevent businesses from exploiting workers and other immoral actions in the name of profit maximization, but not enough to shed businesses of the damage they are responsible for. A lot of those "eco-friendly" businesses are just trying to look good for the public. They are able to get away with this because money is power, even over the government. Lobbyists for these businesses are in the ears of policy-makers dangling money in their face to get their way. Human greed and desire for money is the cause of our own downfall.

Businesses with money have been sneaking around environmental protection regulations and risking people's lives for too long. One prominent example being the Volkswagen Diesel Scam. Volkswagen had been cheating the Environmental Protection Agency's and the California Air Resources Board by using defeat devices, which diminished the effectiveness of emission controls on diesel vehicles. This not only significantly increased pollutants in the air, but it put the drivers' lives in danger. This cheat led to heart issues, respiratory issues, and multiple premature deaths. Volkswagen did not confess to their crime until threatened with punishment. The reason for putting thousands of lives at risk - budget and increasing market share. Profit maximization takes priority over lives as it does in many cases. Environmental lawyers constantly have to navigate cases that deal with selfish businesses versus endangerment of people, animals, and every other living being on the planet.

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Environmental Lawyers' Daily Life

Environmental lawyers put in long and grueling hours into researching cases such as the U.S. v. Volkswagen, communicating with clients, educating others on the consequences of their self-interest driven actions, and advocating for the protection of the environment. They represent a variety of issues and a multitude of stances on certain environmental legal issues. They must analyze, interpret, assess, and persuade juries, judges, and whoever else needs to be convinced to win their case. They offer counseling, conduct interviews, assess different approaches, and do whatever else it takes to develop an argument to strengthen the boundary between gluttonous human activity and hazardous mistakes and the deterioration of the planet.



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