

Internship Report

by



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I chose to conduct my internship in the Environmental Department at Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Echsner, & Proctor, P.A., as environmental law is one of the areas of law that interests me. During my internship, I learned about the type of work that goes into lawsuits, and gained valuable skills for future employment. Much of what I learned cannot be learned from college courses alone, and has contributed to the knowledge I gained from my college courses.

The Environmental Department consists of three attorneys, three paralegals, and one legal secretary. The department is run by the head investigator. Attorneys from other areas of the firm also assist in environmental cases, as well as attorneys from other law firms that are co-counsels in some cases.

Many attorneys and legal staff are required for the size of the cases that the department takes. These are cases in which a company violated environmental regulations, which led to the pollution of the surrounding air, soil, and water. This can cause the value of surrounding properties to decrease and health problems to arise. Several examples of damages that may be awarded in such cases include compensation for medical monitoring, medical expenses, and the devaluation of property. There is a lot of time and money put into lawsuits such as these. Due to their high costs, the firm receives a contingency fee if the lawsuit is won. This is why paralegals do not record billable hours. However, when any expense

associated with a case is incurred, such as copies, traveling expenses, expert witness fees, etc., the case number is notated to keep track of the cost of the case.

The amount of personnel, work, time, and travel that these cases require involve much more work than the average person realizes. Much of the work can be tedious because there is so much of it. For example, it may take over a week for several personnel to copy documents needed for a deposition. I saw this firsthand when I began my internship. I first became familiar with the filing system of documents for one of the class action suits. They were filed in boxes that took up almost an entire room, and placed in order by their master numbers.

I also began to work on deposition preparation in my first month there. There is a tremendous amount of work that goes into deposition preparation. The attorneys review documents received in discovery and production, then decide which ones they want to use for an upcoming deposition. The staff is then given a list of which documents the attorneys are going to use at the deposition. The list of these documents is entered onto a spreadsheet in order of master number. These master numbers are assigned to them automatically in a software program called Case Logistics. The spreadsheet also includes BATES numbers (page numbers placed onto the documents), the author of the document, who the document is addressed to (for instance, who a letter is addressed to), the date of the document, and a brief description. I had the opportunity to work on a part of such a

spreadsheet later in my internship. This taught me what to look for when composing a document description for the attorneys. It should be brief, but contain important information that lets the attorneys know what is in the document. The documents are printed and labeled with their master numbers. For a deposition, one original copy is needed (the copy with the actual master number label), as well as a certain number of copies of the original. The number of copies required varies depending on the needs of the deposition.

These documents are received through discovery and production. I had the opportunity to see several ways that these documents are received. Sometimes, actual copies of the documents are sent in the mail. In this case, the documents are then scanned into the computer in PDF form in such a way that the text of the document is searchable. I was tasked with organizing medical bills in chronological order and scanning them into the computer. This helped me to become familiar with managing medical bills. Some of the bills were faint or printed on colored paper, making them difficult to scan. This allowed me to become familiar with various functions of the scanner.

Another way that documents are provided is digitally on a CD. During my internship, there was one instance in which the opposing party sent documents on CD. Rather than saving each document as one file, each page of one document was a file. I was assigned the task of reviewing the pages of the documents and

determining where each document began and ended. To do this, I converted the files into one PDF document, extracted the pages that made up one document, and then saved that document. As I spent more time on this task, I became more familiar with the evidence. This helped me to recognize where one document ended and the next one began, which is not always easy to distinguish.

These documents are then managed in Case Logistics. It is a great program for organizing documents into different case folders, with subfolders that may contain fact witnesses, expert witnesses, etc. While I did not have the opportunity to actually organize any documents into Case Logistics, I did learn how to search for documents within it. This is one reason why it is so important to make the documents searchable when they are saved on the computer. It is a tremendous help when you are searching for a specific document.

After depositions are taken, each party will select sections of the deposition that it wishes to use at trial. Once the attorneys select the sections they want, a pleading that lists these deposition designations is sent to the opposing party. This list is also organized in the office. I was assigned the task of organizing the deposition designations into binders. To do this, I copied the selected pages within the deposition transcripts, and then marked out the lines that the attorneys did not select. While the attorneys that I worked with preferred to have the designations marked in this manner, others sometimes prefer to have the designations

highlighted. Each page of a deposition is numbered, as is each line on a page. An example of how a deposition designation is notated would be 25:3-31:4 (page 25, line 3 through page 31, line 4). We also received the opposing party's deposition designations, which I organized in the same manner. The attorneys must review the opposing party's designations, and then send another pleading with any objections they may have. These objections contain a brief explanation as to why they are being objected to, and sometimes a counter designation, which is another section of the deposition transcript that is being used to support that objection. Any counter designations are also marked and organized into binders.

Another good learning experience I had during my internship was observing and assisting with Interrogatories and Requests for Production. I spent one day observing and providing assistance to the attorney as needed. The attorney asked the clients the questions the opposing party sent in Interrogatories, and instructed them to bring in any documents that they knew they had, but did not bring with them. This experience showed me how attorneys handle certain situations and clients. Most clients were very friendly and cooperative. Some did not understand that we were from the firm that is representing them rather than from the opposing party's firm until we explained it to them. Others became impatient at times, wondering why the opposing party was asking them all of these questions. Once the attorney re-explained the process, the clients became more cooperative again.

The attorney would save the clients' Responses in a file that was placed on a specific computer. Once these responses were completed, I created file folders for each client and placed their files into them. I also proofread the Responses, and edited the format as needed. These were then proofread and edited again at a later date as needed. This taught me the type of work that is involved in preparing Responses to Interrogatories and Requests for Production.

During my internship, I also worked on other various tasks, such as filing, preparing and sending correspondence letters, and researching the opposing party's witnesses. When researching the witnesses, I searched for any document we had pertaining to that witness in Case Logistics. I also searched the Internet for any articles that the witness may have written, or any news articles in which the witnesses may have been included.

I received a wide variety of experience during this internship. While I have learned about many subjects in my courses at the University of West Florida, the internship has given me an even greater knowledge of these subjects. I learned about depositions, interrogatories, requests for production, and legal software in greater detail. I saw firsthand some of the processes that cases go through. This learning experience will benefit me greatly as I move forward in my career.

To any future interns, I would recommend that if there is a problem at the internship, notify the Internship Coordinator as soon as possible so that the

problem can be corrected. Also speak with the placement supervisor, and let them know that you are capable of assisting with other tasks as well. During the first two weeks of my internship, I spent the majority of my time copying and filing. While I understand that everyone does copying and filing, I felt more like a file/copy clerk rather than a student interning to become a paralegal. Once I notified the Internship Coordinator, she made some phone calls to correct the situation and to ensure that I would be learning what I needed to learn. Shortly thereafter, I began receiving tasks that were more beneficial to my learning experience. I also spoke with my placement supervisor once I had the opportunity, as she was traveling often at the beginning of my internship. She assured me that I would receive more tasks that would be beneficial to my education.

I would also recommend that future interns begin an internship with an open mind. Don't go into an internship with expectations as to what the area of law is like to work in. It may be much different than expected. It is best to start without any presuppositions and to learn as much as possible.

I enjoyed my experience at my internship. Most people do not realize the type or amount of work that actually goes into these lawsuits, and it was very interesting to learn about it. It is a fulfilling area of law, as I know that the work is to help others recover damages caused by a company's violation or negligence. I also gained valuable experience that will assist me in my future endeavors.