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Q&A With Sheppard Mullin's Polly Towill

Law360, New York (July 23, 2009) -- Polly Towill is leader of the toxic torts and products liability team at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP. She has extensive experience in litigating complex business issues in state and federal courts.

Her varied practice includes representing clients in a number of substantive areas including toxic tort litigation, products liability matters, environmental litigation, commercial transactions, real estate, fraud actions, unfair business practice claims, employment disputes, and in performing internal investigations and audits.

Q: What is the most challenging case you've worked on, and why?

A: In general, cases where there is evidence a product is defective and someone has been harmed are by nature very challenging. Though these types of matters are rare in my practice, it is crucial to keep the client informed every step of the way to make the correct decisions on how to proceed. The challenge is giving advice when to litigate liability and when to resolve the dispute.

Q: What accomplishment as an attorney are you most proud of?

A: Although difficult to narrow down to one accomplishment, there have been several large victories that have been career highlights thus far, including winning summary judgment on the eve of a six-month trial on medical causation grounds. Additionally, I have been just as proud at facilitating settlements when both parties had something to lose. Paying attention to the details and finding the winning arguments is challenging and enjoyable. And the pro bono work I've done is also very satisfying.

Q: What aspects of law in your practice area are in need of reform, and why?

A: One area that could be reformed are the laws on the admission of expert testimony. Plaintiffs are at times allowed to put experts on the stand that have no real foundation for their opinions. I am in favor of moving closer to the federal standards.

Q: Where do you see the next wave of cases in your practice area coming from?

A hot area is green chemistry laws in California. Products and their contents are being more heavily regulated.

Q: Outside your own firm, name one lawyer who's impressed you, and tell us why.

A: Kevin Mayer at Liner. He knows the law, puts in the extra effort, and is not afraid to go to trial. He is passionate about his work.

Q: What advice would you give to a young lawyer interested in getting into your practice area?

A: An interest and grasp of science is a huge plus, as well as understanding various industries and their regulations.