



L|C|A

Firm Spotlight

MANKO | GOLD | KATCHER | FOX LLP

AN ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY LAW PRACTICE

Firm Spotlight: Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox LLP

[Cite as 4 Litigation Commentary & Rev. 216 \(February/March 2012\)](#)

More than twenty years ago, the condition of the environment was of some interest in the legal world, but nothing like it is today so it was virtually unthinkable that a law firm could base an entire law practice on the subject. Joseph M. Manko and several of his colleagues were taking a big chance in the early 1970's when they left their large Center City Philadelphia firm to start a firm focused solely on environmental law and litigation.

Manko, Marc E. Gold, Bruce S. Katcher and now managing partner Robert D. Fox are thrilled that today they can celebrate a practice that continues to grow while maintaining its original principles. Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox, LLP (MGKF), with offices in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, and Cherry Hill, New Jersey, has been the firm businesses have turned to for their environment, energy and land use law and litigation needs for more than twenty years. Gold laughs when he says, "Our vision was to create an environmental law firm with an engineering component, and people thought we were crazy for even considering it." As Katcher explains, "A large part of our goal was to combine consulting and legal services, which was never done before. It was, and still is, truly entrepreneurial. One of the key reasons for doing this was to be cost-effective for our clients and to build a team with environmental breadth and depth."

In traditional environmental litigation, such as Superfund and cost recovery actions, toxic tort claims, insurance coverage litigation, and regulatory appeals, the depth of substantive knowledge of the field makes MGKF's litigation group a formidable one. But the firm's litigation practice is much broader. All of MGKF's senior trial attorneys started their careers as commercial litigators at national firms, and those skills still form the backbone of the litigation department. As a result, the firm represents developers, landlords and tenants in all forms of real estate litigation, including disputes over development rights, purchase contracts, leases, easements, landlord-tenant relationships, and the rights and obligations of adjacent landowners. And because of the firm's strengths in negotiating contracts, indemnities and insurance coverage provisions, it regularly handles a wide range of commercial litigation matters, including breach of contract claims, partnership disputes, non-compete claims and fraud actions.

But a focused practice wasn't the only thing that the founders wanted to do differently. While other firms were putting increasing pressure on its attorneys to bill more hours in order to create greater profits, MGKF was to be a place where employee satisfaction was the measure of success. Gold put it this way: "Joe set the tone that the culture of the firm be family-oriented, where quality of life would be valued. We all felt the same way." This principle is still a key factor that drives the firm. Quality of

life is valued for every staff person at the firm, from secretarial to the partners. The partners developed an award-winning customized employment policy, creating work schedules to accommodate the personal needs of the staff, and allowing both professionals and support staff to move between full and part-time work seamlessly as their personal needs change. Fox, who is now the firm's managing partner, said, "I'm incredibly proud of what we've created – it's so unique how we treat our employees."

Satisfaction is also measured by the work, so from the start, it was important that the work always be interesting and challenging, and that the caliber of the staff be high. Gold continued, "We never take our reputation for granted. We work with agencies and many different corporations and, from the day we started, we knew that we could only gain their confidence if they trusted us and had confidence in our firm." Fox talks about the staff acknowledging their value. "We have an incredibly talented group at MGKF with very little turnover. It's personally rewarding to know that the attorneys, technical experts and our support staff like it here and choose to stay."

Beyond the work, MGKF attorneys are also committed to sharing their passion for the kind of work they do with new generations of lawyers. In 1988, Manko and Fox started teaching at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and as a result, the firm has hired at least a dozen students from Penn, students who understood the firm's culture and sought to practice at MGKF after taking Manko and Fox's classes. As an example, one of their partners today, Bart Cassidy, now nationally recognized for his knowledge on air issues, was one of their students. More recently, associate Diana Silva joined the MGKF team after taking a Drexel Law class on Toxic Torts taught by litigators Neil Witkes and Kate Campbell.

And, finally, giving back to the community is a strong priority at MGKF. Most of the 28 attorneys associated with the firm today volunteer for various environmental-based organizations, demonstrating their deep felt commitment to the environment and their personal desire to make the world a better place. In addition, the firm has been involved in many campaigns that educate and reward environmental stewardship. For example, for the past six years, the firm has partnered with local companies to run the Environmental Community Service Award through which a dozen middle schools and high schools in the region have been chosen to receive financial grants for their outstanding environmental programs that enrich their communities. And over the years the firm has adopted a number of "green practices" relative to overall sustainable operations, including energy use, procurement and waste management. Fox adds, "We want to help increase environmental education not only through our Community Service Award, but through local, state and national presentations to inform people about sustainable practices that can make a substantial impact."

Thinking back twenty years, the worldwide focus on the environment has been on a pendulum, but never has it had more importance globally than it does today. Katcher said, "Now, there is a renewed interest in the environment over concerns of global warming/climate change. Businesses want to use sustainable practices more than ever." Gold agreed, "Not only are environmental issues hot again, companies want to 'out-green' others in the global market."

Gold recalled the early years and said, "When we began the firm, air, water and waste were traditional issues we handled with clients. Sustainability, carbon footprint and energy conservation hadn't emerged yet." Katcher added, "Today the firm is expanding its focus to include sources of renewable energy like wind and solar." Fox said, "And, the discovery of Marcellus Shale has provided more opportunities for growth as this natural resource can be tapped as alternative fuel." Manko said, "Working in the field of environment means that work will always be challenging and interesting as it is ever-evolving and changing. That's the beauty of practicing law in this field."