



Sarah Peterman Bell

Partner

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Sarah Bell focuses her practice on environmental and natural resources litigation, administrative proceedings, and counseling, and advises clients in a broad range of disputes, including enforcement actions, cost recovery, citizen suits, water quality, complex toxic tort, and product liability matters. She has significant experience in matters involving both emerging contaminants – including PFAS – as well as legacy contaminants like PCE, TCE and other chemicals and VOCs. The bulk of her expertise involves cases relating to natural resources such as groundwater, surface water, sediments, air, and soil. She has experience with all the major federal and state environmental statutes, including the Clean Water Act, CERCLA, NEPA and CEQA, Proposition 65, RCRA, and the ESA.

Sarah's clients include manufacturers and distributors, transportation companies, wineries, research institutions, and commercial property owners. She has litigated matters throughout the western United States, in both state and federal courts, including Washington State, Nevada, New Mexico and California.

Sarah also counsels clients with respect to regulatory compliance, including storm water management and NPDES permits, site cleanup, and product stewardship, where she advises clients in matters relating to chemical content and PFAS laws and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations. She often helps clients identify and mitigate environmental risks. As a counselor, Sarah seeks to keep her clients *out* of court. In these matters, she effectively negotiates reasonable resolutions so clients can maintain focus on their core businesses.

Whether in or out of court, Sarah is persuasive, engaging, and aggressive when necessary. She seeks solutions that are in the best interests of her clients, with a focus on pragmatism and client needs rather than a "one size fits all" approach. Environmental issues can be complex and involve high-stakes liability. Sarah is efficient and calm in a crisis, and brings order to this potential chaos.

Sarah was a judicial extern for the Honorable Maxine Chesney of the Northern District of California.

Distinctions

- *The Best Lawyers in America*, Environmental Law; Litigation–Environmental (2024-2025)
- *Chambers USA*: Environment - California, Band 4 (2021-2024)
- *The Lawdragon Green 500*: Leaders in Environmental Law (2023-2025)
- *Benchmark Litigation*, 40 & Under Hotlist (2018)
- Super Lawyers, Northern California Rising Stars (2012-2013)

Memberships and Affiliations

- Member, ELI Leadership Council (2025)
- Co-Chair, Environmental & Energy Litigation Committee, Litigation Section, American Bar Association (2024-2025)
- Executive Committee Member, Environmental Law Section (Advisors/Emeritus), Bar Association of San Francisco

Services

- Environmental Law
- Environmental Litigation
- Environmental Regulatory / Compliance
- Cannabis
- Consumer Products + Manufacturing
- Natural Resource Protection
- Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
- Product Liability and Stewardship
- Proposition 65 Counseling and Defense
- Renewable Energy

Education

- University of California College of the Law, San Francisco (formerly UC Hastings) (J.D., 2003)
 - *Constitutional Law Quarterly*; *Hastings Law News*; writing awards, Appellate Advocacy and Moot Court
- Princeton University (A.B., 2000)

Bar Admissions

- California

Court Admissions

- 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals
- U.S. District Court (N.D. Cal.)

- Board of Directors, Golden Gate Audubon Society (2009 – 2016)
- Board of Directors, California Summer Music (2009 – 2013)

Experience

CERCLA Cost Recovery and Contribution

Represented and successfully resolved CERCLA cost recovery and contribution litigation against beverage company at major NPL Superfund site.

CERCLA Natural Resources Damages Defense

Advice and counseling of confidential client in ongoing NRD and Assessment matters.

CERCLA Prosecution, Cost Recovery and Contribution

Represents/represented transportation company in multiple cost recovery and contribution actions, including successful settlement involving payment to client.

Civil Enforcement Defense

Represents beverage company in negotiations with and resolution of potential enforcement by regulator.

CWA Citizen Suit Defense and Water Quality Counseling

Represented multiple clients, including wineries, recycling facilities, and other industrial operations in successful resolution of CWA citizen suits.

Land Use

Represented quarry owner in obtaining unanimous EIR certification, approval of reclamation plan and renewal of mining permit by County Supervisors, and favorably resolving nuisance claims relating to same in California.

PFAS – Environmental Regulatory, Counseling, and Litigation

Represents confidential client in ongoing PFAS matters involving State cleanup order, investigation and remediation, negotiations with State and local agencies and third parties, and potential cost recovery litigation.

PFAS – Product Compliance, Regulatory

Represents confidential client in product stewardship and product regulatory compliance issues in states throughout the United States and under Federal law, including TSCA.

Product Liability/ Toxic Tort Defense

Represents product manufacturer in multiple coordinated lawsuits throughout California regarding groundwater contamination due to historical applications of soil fumigants. Successfully negotiated resolution of dozens of lawsuits, often by dismissal with no settlement payment.

Proposition 65 and Product Liability Defense

Successful resolution of multiple Prop. 65 challenges, including defense of manufacturer in major ongoing Prop. 65 litigation relating to use of recycled materials in production.

State Superfund Trial

Represented a transportation company in a four-week trial in federal District Court in Washington in a state Superfund contribution action relating to a former wood treating site. Obtained a complete defense judgment.

Toxic Tort Defense

Represented railroad in litigation, resulting in favorable settlement following partial summary judgment, involving claims of property damage, personal injury, and fear of future illness relating to groundwater contamination and vapor intrusion.

PFAS – Regulatory, Counseling, and Litigation

Represents confidential client in ongoing PFAS matters involving State regulatory order, investigation and remediation, negotiations with State and local agencies and third parties, and potential litigation.

State Superfund Trial

Represented a transportation company in a 4-week trial in federal District Court in Washington in a state Superfund contribution action relating to a former wood treating site. Obtained a complete defense judgment.

Publications

February 19, 2025

"Forever Chemicals" and Their Impact on the Wine Industry

November 22, 2024

Defense Insights As PFAS Consumer Product Claims Rise

Law360

April 9, 2024

Where Are We Now, Following Maui County, Sackett, and the Latest EPA Guidance?

American Bar Association

November 21, 2022

California Attorney General's Office Files PFAS Lawsuit

April 19, 2022

Summary of Latest Federal Action Regarding PFAS

ABA Environmental and Energy Litigation Subcommittee

June 4, 2020

New EPA Clean Water Act Rule Attempts to Streamline Permitting Process

May 21, 2020

Supreme Court Ruling Expands Reach of Clean Water Act NPDES Permitting

California Ag Net

April 23, 2020

Major Supreme Court Ruling Expands Reach of Clean Water Act NPDES Permitting to Certain Discharges to Groundwater

March 30, 2020

Perfluorinated Compounds: No Longer an Emerging Contaminant

Industrial Equipment News

March 19, 2019

Emerging Contaminants: Coming to an NRD Site Near You!

ABA Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources

6/14/2018

Discharges Through Groundwater: Fourth Circuit Expands CWA Jurisdiction

4/16/2018

Fourth Circuit Joins Ninth Circuit in Expanding Clean Water Act Jurisdiction Over Discharges to Navigable Waters Conveyed Through Groundwater

2/15/2018

Ninth Circuit Ruling Expands Clean Water Act Jurisdiction Over Groundwater Discharges

3/2/2017

Be Prepared for California's Environmental Rules: Regulated Cannabis Brings Forth New Water Use Guidelines

7/28/2016

New Ninth Circuit Decision Precluding CERCLA Liability for Airborne Emissions

6/1/2016

U.S. Supreme Court Issues Landmark Decision Authorizing Review of Wetland Jurisdictional Determinations

12/17/2015

U.S. Supreme Court Agrees to Decide Important Case Affecting Development in Wetlands

3/31/2015

Court Of Appeal Upholds "Safe Harbor" Exemption From Prop 65 Warnings For Lead In Fruit Products

1/16/2015

Proposition 65 Plaintiff Group Seeks to Rescind "Safe Harbor" Standard for Lead

9/4/2014

CERCLA's Novel and Untested Defenses: Acts of God, Acts of War, Acts of Third Parties and Cultural Resource Damages

3/9/2011

CERCLA's Unrecoverable Natural Resource Damages: Injuries to Cultural Resources and Services

Outside the Office

Sarah has young children, so much of her time outside the office is spent outdoors with her family. She and her family like to hike and swim in the ocean, and they undertake lots of local Bay Area adventures. She also enjoys watching both her kids carry on her love of various sports, including baseball, softball, and soccer.