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Debi L. Davis

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COMMENT

INSUREDS VERSUS INSURERS: LITIGATING COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL LIABILITY POLICY COVERAGE IN THE CERCLA ARENA—A LOSING BATTLE FOR BOTH SIDES

by Debi L. Davis

An enormous problem facing corporations and society today involves who will foot the bill for the ever-increasing costs of ridding the environment of toxic wastes. Congress, concerned with expediting the cleanup of hazardous materials, implemented the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA). Congress intended that CERCLA provide both a statutory means for speedy cleanup and a basis for establishing liability. CERCLA makes certain par-

1. The American Bar Journal published an article in 1987 that estimated that at least 26,000 hazardous waste sites existed in the United States. Marcotte, Toxic Blackacre: Unprecedented Liability for Landowners, 73 A.B.A. J. 67 (Nov. 1987). The Marcotte article also noted an estimate given by the General Accounting Office indicating that the number could increase to as many as 368,000 sites in the foreseeable future. Id. at 67. As an example of the enormous cost of cleaning up hazardous waste sites, see United States v. Shell Oil Co., 605 F. Supp. 1064, 1067, 1085 (D. Colo. 1985). In that case the EPA sued Shell for 1.8 billion dollars in cleanup costs for approximately 27 square miles of land polluted with hazardous waste.

2. Pub. L. No. 96-510, 94 Stat. 2767 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 9601-9675 (1988)). This Act creates what has become known as the Superfund, which is funded by a surtax on certain chemicals. The EPA uses the Superfund to clean up hazardous waste sites when the responsible party is insolvent or cannot be located.

ties\(^4\) liable to federal and state governments for response and remedial costs\(^5\) incurred by both the EPA and the states in the cleanup of hazardous waste sites.\(^6\) CERCLA, however, fails to address the issue of whether these costs are covered by insurance policies.\(^7\)

In an effort to avoid paying for costly cleanups, PRPs\(^8\) have looked to their insurance carriers for defense and indemnification under comprehensive general liability (CGL) policies.\(^9\) Insurance companies, not wanting to bear the expense of these cleanups, have uniformly denied coverage of CERCLA-related costs.\(^10\) This conflict regarding coverage under CGL policies

4. 42 U.S.C. § 9607 (1988). CERCLA defines potentially responsible parties (PRPs) as:
   (1) the owner and operator of a vessel or a facility,
   (2) any person who at the time of disposal of any hazardous substance owned or operated any facility at which such hazardous substances were disposed of,
   (3) any person who by contract, agreement, or otherwise arranged for disposal or treatment, or arranged with a transporter for transport for disposal or treatment, of hazardous substances owned or possessed by such person, by any other party or entity, at any facility or incineration vessel owned or operated by another party or entity and containing such hazardous substances, and
   (4) any person who accepts or accepted any hazardous substances for transport to disposal or treatment facilities, incineration vessels or sites selected by such person, from which there is a release, or a threatened release which causes the incidence of response costs, of a hazardous substance . . . .
   *Id.* § 9607(a). For a definition of a hazardous waste facility, see *id.* § 9601(9).

5. CERCLA defines “response” costs as costs incurred in “removal . . . and remedial action[s] . . . [including] enforcement activities related thereto.” *Id.* § 9601(25). CERCLA defines “remedy” to include “storage confinement . . . [or] cleanup of released hazardous substances and associated contaminated materials, recycling or reuse, diversion, destruction, segregation of reactive wastes . . . and any monitoring reasonably required to assure that such actions protect the public health and welfare and the environment.” *Id.* § 9601(24). The EPA’s broad power includes the right to recover costs for investigating, testing, evaluating, removing, maintaining, and monitoring hazardous waste sites. *Id.* § 9604(b). According to CERCLA, removal actions include “such actions as may be necessary to monitor, assess, and evaluate the release or threat of release of hazardous substances . . . .” *Id.* § 9601(23).

6. *Id.* § 9607(a)(4)(A). CERCLA also makes PRPs liable to private persons for response costs incurred in cleaning up hazardous waste sites. *Id.* § 9607(a)(4)(B). See supra note 5 for a definition of response costs. CERCLA specifically holds the statutorily defined responsible parties liable for “any other necessary costs of response incurred by any other person consistent with a national contingency plan.” *Id.; see* Wickland Oil Terminals v. Asarco, Inc., 792 F.2d 887, 893 (9th Cir. 1986) (CERCLA expressly creates cause of action for recovery of response costs incurred by private parties).

7. See 42 U.S.C. §§ 9601-9657 (1988). The CERCLA statutory scheme does not mention insurance coverage of costs incurred pursuant to CERCLA.


10. Insurance carriers typically deny CGL coverage under one or more of the following theories:
   1. The pollution does not constitute an “occurrence” under the meaning of the policy;
   2. There was no occurrence during the policy period;
has resulted in major litigation. Spending millions of dollars in this coverage-related litigation, both the insurer and the insured waste assets and time, creating an ordeal that ultimately produces no winners.

This Comment focuses on the different interpretation courts are giving CGL policies with respect to whether a judgment rendered pursuant to CERCLA constitutes damages within the context of CGL policies. The Comment examines some of the problems created by the interaction between CERCLA and CGL policies and the untenable situation the resulting conflicts pose to insureds and insurers. This Comment concludes that no one wins in the current climate and accordingly suggests some solutions, including the potential solution of requiring insurance carriers and their insureds to fund cleanup of hazardous waste sites cooperatively.

3. Pollution damage does not constitute property damage within the meaning of the policy;
4. The pollution exclusion clause in the policy precludes coverage;
5. The completed operations exclusion in the policy precludes coverage; and
6. No coverage exists because cleanup costs are not damages within the meaning of a CGL policy.


12. The case of United States v. Conservation Chem. Co., 653 F. Supp. 152, 158-63 (W.D. Mo. 1986) involved a lengthy trial before a special master with at least nine law firms representing twelve insurance carriers and ten different insured corporations. Id. The cost of legal counsel, alone, must have been staggering.

13. This Comment will not address the ramifications of the new Commercial General Liability Policy that came out in 1986. The new CGL policy attempts to unequivocally exclude all damages that might possibly arise from the cleanup of a hazardous waste site. See COMMERCIAL GENERAL LIABILITY POLICY § I.A.2.f (1986). The 1986 CGL policy provides:

   This insurance does not apply to: . . .

   f. (1) "Bodily injury" or "property damage" arising out of the actual, alleged or threatened discharge, dispersal, release or escape of pollutants:
   (a) At or from premises you own, rent or occupy;
   (b) At or from any site or location used by or for you or others for the handling, storage, disposal, processing or treatment of waste;
   (c) Which are at any time transported, handled, stored, treated, disposed of, or processed as waste by or for you or any person or organization for whom you may be legally responsible; or
   (d) At or from any site or location on which you or any contractors or subcontractors working directly or indirectly on your behalf are performing operations:
   (i) if the pollutants are brought on or to the site or location in connection with such operations; or
   (ii) if the operations are to test for, monitor, clean up, remove, contain, treat, detoxify or neutralize the pollutants.

   (2) Any loss, cost, or expense arising out of any governmental direction or request that you test for, monitor, clean up, remove, contain, treat, detoxify or neutralize pollutants.

Id. This Comment will only deal with litigation arising under CGL policies issued prior to 1986.
I. BACKGROUND: ORIGINS OF INSURER VERSUS INSURED CONFLICT

A. The CERCLA Statutory Scheme

CERCLA provides for the establishment of a federal fund to finance cleanup of hazardous waste sites when no responsible parties can be found. CERCLA grants the President and the EPA broad power to establish priorities in the toxic waste cleanup process. CERCLA also grants the EPA the power to demand cleanup of hazardous sites dangerous to the public. Additionally, the EPA has the power to undertake cleanup operations itself and institute a subsequent action to recover its own costs. The CERCLA statutory scheme provides for injunctive relief by permitting the EPA to issue an order to compel cleanup or to obtain a court order compelling cleanup of a hazardous waste facility. CERCLA also allows for restitutional relief by authorizing the EPA to expend funds from the federal Superfund to clean up toxic waste sites and subsequently to institute cost recovery actions against

15. CERCLA grants the EPA the authority to develop the National Contingency Plan (NCP), establishing the procedures for cleaning up hazardous waste sites. Id. § 9605. All costs incurred in cleanup must be consistent with the NCP in order to be recoverable in subsequent cost recovery litigation. See 40 C.F.R. §§ 300.61-.71 (1988); 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a) (1988). The EPA also has the responsibility for prioritizing sites by establishing the National Priority List (NPL). 40 C.F.R. § 300.68 (1988). CERCLA, moreover, imposes strict liability on PRPs. 42 U.S.C. § 9607(b)(1)-(4) (1988). CERCLA limits defenses to those statutorily enumerated. Id. The defenses to CERCLA strict liability include:
   (1) an act of God;
   (2) an act of war;
   (3) an act or omission of a third party other than an employee or agent of the defendant, or than one whose act or omission occurs in connection with a contractual relationship, existing directly or indirectly, with the defendant (except where the sole contractual arrangement arises from a published tariff and acceptance for carriage by a common carrier by rail), if the defendant establishes by a preponderance of the evidence that (a) he exercised due care with respect to the hazardous substance concerned, taking into consideration the characteristics of such hazardous substance, in light of all relevant facts and circumstances, and (b) he took precautions against foreseeable acts or omissions of any such third party and the consequences that could foreseeably result from such acts or omissions; or
   (4) any combination of the foregoing paragraphs.

16. CERCLA empowers both the President and the EPA to institute actions or to issue administrative orders to compel action by private parties in the event of an "imminent and substantial endangerment to the public health or welfare of the environment" due to the release or threatened release of a hazardous substance. 42 U.S.C. § 9606(a) (1988). To ensure compliance with a § 9606(a) order, the EPA may either commence an action to enforce the order under § 9607(b)(1) or perform the remedial work itself and then commence an action to recover its costs under § 9607(c)(3). Significantly, CERCLA does not permit a party to challenge the merits or basis of any order to compel. See Solid State Circuits, Inc. v U.S. E.P.A., 812 F.2d 383, 386 (8th Cir. 1987); Dickerson v. Administrator, 834 F.2d 974, 977-78 (11th Cir. 1987). The Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA) provides, with exceptions for actions brought by the EPA or by a private party seeking reimbursement that "[n]o Federal Court shall have jurisdiction ... to review any order issued under section 9606(a)." 42 U.S.C. § 9613(h) (1988).
18. See id. § 9606. Pursuant to § 9606(a), the President or the EPA can institute an action to compel cleanup of a hazardous waste site. Id.
Finally, CERCLA allows the EPA to institute an action against responsible parties for monetary damages to compensate for damaged public resources. The CERCLA scheme can thus be categorized as a mixture of equitable and legal remedies. Some courts have characterized response costs incurred under CERCLA as equitable in nature and have denied insurance coverage based upon the traditional distinction between legal and equitable damages. Consequently, the type of action that the EPA or the state brings and the way that a particular court characterizes the action comes to the forefront of the debate as to whether costs incurred in complying with CERCLA judgments constitute damages that are covered under a CGL policy.

B. Comprehensive General Liability Policies

As with any contract, the language of an insurance policy is the focal point in determining coverage under the policy. An insurance policy represents a contract between the insured and the insurer, and coverage exists only if assumed under the terms of the policy. The scope of a CGL policy is at the heart of hazardous waste litigation.

The CGL is a third-party policy, whereby the insurer promises to indemnify the insured against claims by third parties who are injured or who have property that is injured through the acts or omissions of the insured. Although the standard CGL policy first arose in 1940, policy revisions in 1966 and 1973 spawned most of the environmental litigation to date. Coverage under CGL policies has evolved through court decisions focusing on the difficulties of dealing with personal injuries and property damage associated with gradual processes.

Prior to 1966 the CGL policies applied an accident-oriented focus with an intent to cover sudden and unexpected events. After 1966, CGL policies

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19. Id. § 9607(a)(4)(C).
20. See id., which holds PRPs liable for “damages for injury to, destruction of, or loss of natural resources, including the reasonable costs of assessing such injury, destruction, or loss resulting from such a release.” Id.
22. See cases cited infra notes 85-132 and accompanying text.
28. Id.
utilized an occurrence approach, which focused on damages that occurred gradually, over an extended period of time. The 1966 and 1973 CGL policies were standardized and contained the same language in the coverage clause at issue. The standard CGL policy language at issue in toxic tort litigation provides that “[t]he [insurer] will pay on behalf of the insured all sums which the insured shall become legally obligated to pay as damages because of property damage.” The insurer thereby agrees to indemnify the insured by paying all sums that the insured must pay to third parties as damages because of an occurrence causing property damage.

The uncertainty of the scope of three key terms in CGL policies, namely “occurrence,” “property damage,” and “damages,” has resulted in much controversy and litigation in the environmental arena. “Occurrence,” under 1966 and 1973 CGL policies, includes continuous or repeated exposure to conditions that are unexpected and unintended from the standpoint of the insured. Court decisions generally focus on the issue of whether or not the insured expected or intended the happening of the occurrence in determining CGL policy coverage. Once a party establishes an occurrence, the triggering of the policy coverage becomes an issue. The courts have formulated at least five different “trigger theories” to determine when an occurrence triggers insurance policy coverage.

31. Id. at 759.
32. See Taking the Insurers, supra note 24, at 1110.
33. Id.
34. For discussion of the distinction between property damage and economic loss, see Note, CERCLA Cleanup Costs Under Comprehensive General Liability Insurance Policies: Property Damage or Economic Damage, 56 FORDHAM L. REV. 1169 (1988) [hereinafter CERCLA Cleanup].
35. See Taking the Insurers, supra note 24, at 1110.
36. See City of Carter Lake v Aetna Casualty & Sur. Co., 604 F.2d 1052, 1058-59 (8th Cir. 1979). The court noted that, For the purposes of an exclusionary clause in an insurance policy the word “expected” denotes that the actor knew or should have known that there was a substantial probability that certain consequences [would] result from his actions. If the insured knew or should have known that there was a substantial probability that certain results would follow his acts or omissions then there has not been an occurrence or accident as defined in [a CGL] policy . . . .
37. These theories are (1) the actual injury theory; see Independent Petrochemical Corp. v. Aetna Casualty & Sur. Co., 654 F. Supp. 1334, 1357-58 (D.D.C 1986) (policies triggered when injury actually occurs, even if injury not discoverable); (2) the manifestation theory; see Mráz v. Canadian Universal Ins. Co., 804 F.2d 1325, 1328 (4th Cir. 1986) (coverage is triggered when the damage first “manifests” or is discovered); (3) the exposure theory; see Technalloy Co. v. Reliance Ins. Co., 338 Pa. Super. 1, 487 A.2d 820, 823 (1984) (injury occurs when exposure to that which ultimately causes injury occurs regardless of when discovered); (4) the
A finding of property damage is a second element required to trigger CGL coverage.38 "Property damage" is defined under the 1966 CGL policy as "injury to or destruction of tangible property."39 The 1973 policies expanded the definition of property damage to include injuries to real property caused by an occurrence during the policy period.40 The primary point of dispute in the property damage area is whether a loss constitutes actual property damage or mere economic loss.41

The definition of "damages" represents the third element at issue in the interpretation of a CGL policy in the context of CERCLA. The standard CGL policy covers "all sums which the insured shall become legally obligated to pay as damages because of bodily injury, or property damage."42 The definition of damages has been crucial to the determination of whether CGL policies cover costs incurred or awarded under CERCLA.43

C. The Ambiguity Rule

In construing insurance policies, courts rely on certain rules of interpretation.44 Under the law of most states, if the meaning of a policy provision is ambiguous or susceptible to different constructions, courts construe the policy against the insurer.45 Ordinarily, the rationale for the "ambiguity rule"...
centers around a public policy argument premised upon the notion that insurance is an adhesion contract and the unwary and unsophisticated purchaser needs protection. Under this rationale, courts adopt the construction of the provision most favorable to the insured. Courts construing the damages clause in CGL policies have seized upon the ambiguity rule to facilitate finding CERCLA costs recoverable under CGL policies.

Courts have rejected the ambiguity rule's application, however, to parties of equal bargaining power, a situation found in many of the environmental cleanup cases. This alternate treatment is based on the presumption that the commercial insured is sophisticated and represented by competent legal counsel and is therefore undeserving of such a strong presumption in its favor. The choice a particular court makes in either adopting the ambiguity rule or finding a lack of ambiguity in an insurance clause generally determines the outcome in CERCLA coverage disputes.

D. Legal Damages Versus Equitable Relief

To a layperson, the CGL provision obligating the insurer to pay amounts designated as damages conjures up images of the insurer compensating for all of the financial consequences a loser faces in a litigated dispute. Black's

Law Dictionary contains a much more limited definition of damages. Old insurance case law, moreover, narrows the definition of damages even further by utilizing the historical distinction between equitable relief and damages when interpreting CGL policies. These early cases interpreting damages as distinct from any type of equitable relief form the backbone of one of the modern positions concerning CGL policies, the position that CERCLA costs are not damages under CGL policies.

1. Desrochers and Hanna: Background for Equity Damages Distinction

The Supreme Court of New Hampshire in Desrochers v. New York Casualty Co. considered the interpretation of damages in a CGL policy. Desrochers involved an appeal following an action for declaratory judgment to determine the rights and obligations of the parties to the CGL policy, which contained the standard policy provision obligating the insurer to pay damages incurred by the insured as a result of third-party property damage. The Desrochers court held that the expense of complying with a court order requiring the insured to remove an obstruction to a culvert that caused adjacent property to flood was not recoverable under the CGL policy. The court found that a reasonable man in the position of the insured would not have believed that the cost of compliance with an injunction would constitute damages. The court reasoned that the term "damages" denotes a legal, technical meaning in the insurance context, and, as such, courts must distinguish equitable types of relief from legal damages.

In 1955, in Aetna Casualty & Surety Co. v. Hanna, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals adopted the Desrochers distinction between legal damages and equitable relief in terms of CGL policy coverage. The Hannas brought

52. Black's Law Dictionary 352 (5th ed. 1979) defines "damages" as:
   a pecuniary compensation or indemnity, which may be recovered in the courts by any person who has suffered loss, detriment, or injury, whether to his person, property, or rights, through the unlawful act or omission or negligence of another. A sum of money awarded to a person injured by the tort of another. In defining the word "damage," however, Black's Law Dictionary notes that "[damage] is to be distinguished from its plural damages, which means a compensation in money for a loss or damage." Id. at 351.
56. Id.
57. Id. at 198-99.
58. Id.
59. 224 F.2d 499, 503 (5th Cir. 1955).
60. See id. at 503-04.
an action against their insurance company for recovery of costs and expenses stemming from state court litigation that resulted in the issuance of an injunction against the Hannas.61 The injunction ordered the Hannas to remove boulders and fill material that storms and high water had carried from their property and deposited on the adjoining property.62 The mandatory injunction also required the Hannas to construct and maintain a bulkhead to prevent future encroachment upon the adjoining property.63 The Hannas' CGL insurance carrier refused to defend the suit on behalf of the Hannas and advised that the action was not covered within the policy term "damages."64

Applying Florida law,65 the Fifth Circuit expressly adopted the Desrocher reasoning,66 concluding that the CGL policy covers only those costs the insured must pay to third persons because they have a legal claim for damages.67 Applying the technical interpretation of the word "damages," the Hanna court emphasized the difference between equitable, injunctive relief and legal damages and denied CGL policy coverage of the expenses that the Hannas had incurred in complying with the mandatory injunction ordering cleanup of the debris.68 While the Fourth Circuit has subsequently adopted the Fifth Circuit's narrow, technical definition of damages when analyzing the right to recovery of CERCLA-type costs under CGL policies,69 other courts have expressly rejected the restrictive definition.70

2. U.S. Aviex v. Traveler's: Background for Refusing to Distinguish Between Equity and Damages

In 1983, the Michigan Court of Appeals in United States Aviex v. Travelers Insurance Co.71 expressly rejected the Desrochers and Hanna distinction between equitable relief and damages in the context of CGL policy coverage of environmental damage.72 U.S. Aviex was the first case to hold that the term damages in CGL policies included costs incurred in state-ordered environmental cleanups.73 The case involved an appeal from a declaratory judgment ordering Traveler's Insurance to reimburse U.S. Aviex for costs incurred in investigating, monitoring, and correcting contamination of the groundwater underneath U.S. Aviex's property due to an accidental toxic

61. Id. at 500-01.
62. Id.
63. Id.
64. Id.
65. Id. at 503.
66. The Hanna court noted that Desrochers v. New York Casualty Co., 99 N.H. 129, 106 A.2d 196 (1954), "is on all fours with the case at bar, and the policy provisions . . . are identical . . . [W]e cite with approval [the Desrochers court's] reasoning and the result reached." Id. at 503-04.
67. Id.
68. Id.
69. See infra note 98 and accompanying text.
70. See infra note 72 and accompanying text.
72. Id.
73. See Insurance Coverage, supra note 30, at 767.
chemical seepage that occurred while containing a fire on the premises. The court in *U.S. Aviex* rejected the argument that costs incurred in remedying property damage in response to equitable or injunctive orders were not covered under CGL policies because such costs were not damages. The court instead interpreted damages to include monetary relief the insured must pay because of legal liability. The court stated that the more encompassing definition accords with the ordinary insured's understanding of the term "damages."

Referring to the state's interest in its natural resources, the court noted that whether a state government chooses to sue for reimbursement or for monetary damages to natural resources is merely fortuitous from the standpoint of either the insured or the insurer. The court, consequently, found the insurance carrier liable for the defense and the indemnification of *U.S. Aviex* with respect to the state's injunctive action seeking cleanup of the toxic contamination.

*U.S. Aviex* initiated the present controversy over whether the equitable nature of suits seeking to recover environmental statutory cleanup costs conclusively determines insurance coverage and also instigated the judicial debate over whether insurance companies actually owe a duty under CGL policies to defend or to indemnify insureds in such proceedings. By rejecting the equity-damage distinction in old insurance case law, *U.S. Aviex* set a modern precedent for other courts to follow and is the leading authority for the proposition that environmental cleanup costs are damages covered under a CGL policy despite the apparent equitable character of the remedy.

II. CURRENT LEGAL STATUS: TURMOIL IN THE COURTS

The question of whether CERCLA response costs constitute recoverable damages under a CGL policy created a sharp difference of opinion among the courts. Three circuits courts have addressed the issue on the merits, rendering only four decisions. A number of district courts, however, have

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74. *U.S. Aviex*, 336 N.W.2d at 840.
75. *Id.* at 843.
76. *Id.* at 842-43.
77. *See id.*
78. *Id.*
79. *Id.*
80. *Id.*
addressed the issue.84

A. Cleanup Costs Do Not Constitute “Damages”

I. Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, in Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco,85 was the first federal circuit to address the issue of coverage under CGL policies for CERCLA response costs.86 Armco arose as an offshoot from United States v. Conservation Chemical Co.87 The Conservation Chemical case lends insight into the context surrounding the Armco decision.

In Conservation Chemical Armco was one of several “deep pocket” defendants against which the United States instituted a CERCLA action as hazardous waste generators that had allegedly disposed of hazardous waste at a certain facility.88 The government sought to compel Armco and other PRPs to implement a comprehensive remedial action and sought to recover costs already incurred in cleaning up the facility. Armco and the other waste generator defendants filed an amended third-party complaint against Maryland Casualty, in addition to the site operator’s other insurance carriers, alleging that Armco and the other waste generator defendants constituted third-party beneficiaries of the site operator’s CGL insurance policies. The defendants sought indemnification and defense from the operator’s insurers. The district judge signed an order adopting a special master’s recommendations, including a finding that the CERCLA response costs constituted damages within the meaning of CGL policies.89 Immediately thereafter, Maryland Casualty entered into a settlement agreement with Armco and the other defendants, and the district judge vacated his order nunc pro tunc.90 Following the settlement of Conservation Chemical and after the extensive litigation involved in that case, Maryland Casualty filed suit against Armco seeking a declaratory judgment as to its liability under Armco’s CGL policy.91

The trial court in Armco determined that the term “damages” was not

85. 822 F.2d 1348 (4th Cir. 1987).
86. See id. at 1351-55.
87. 653 F. Supp. 152 (W.D. Mo. 1986). The Conservation Chemical litigation involved several Fortune 500 companies, including IBM & AT&T Technologies. Id. at 159.
88. Id. at 159, 167-70.
89. See Armco, 822 F.2d at 1351.
90. Id.
91. The language contained in the Maryland Casualty—Armco policy, at issue in the Conservation Chemical case, was nearly identical to that contained in the Maryland Casualty policy that was the subject of the Armco case. Id. The trial court in the Armco case, however, found that the action taken by the Missouri district court in Conservation Chemical was not res judicata as to the Armco case and did not give rise to collateral estoppel of the policy coverage issue because the judge vacated the order following the parties’ settlement agreement. Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco, Inc., 643 F. Supp. 430, 432-33 (D. Md. 1986).
ambiguous in the insurance context because insurance law distinguishes between legal and equitable relief, and held that claims for equitable relief do not constitute claims for damages under CGL policies. The Armco court bolstered its equity distinction by analogizing to constitutional seventh amendment judicial analysis of right to trial by jury, noting that courts addressing the issue in CERCLA cases unanimously denied jury trials based upon CERCLA’s inherent equitable nature. Rejecting authority that held to the contrary and quoting specific portions of the special master’s report in Conservation Chemical, the Armco trial court sarcastically noted that by adopting the U.S. Aviex court’s reasoning, a court would essentially adopt no reasoning.

The Fourth Circuit upheld the trial court’s decision on appeal, holding that Maryland Casualty had no duty to defend or to indemnify Armco in the CERCLA action brought by the EPA. After noting that courts should give terms of an insurance policy provision the meaning that a reasonable person would give, the Fourth Circuit interpreted the term “damages” by affording it the technical meaning set forth in Hanna. The Armco court then analyzed the nature of the relief the government sought in the CERCLA action and held that since the action involved reimbursement of costs incurred in connection with the cleanup of the site, combined with injunctive relief compelling remedial action, the relief sought did not constitute legal damages and instead was a form of equity.

The Fourth Circuit court went on to formulate a test for defining damages. The court instructed that the test should involve a determination of the form of relief sought rather than a determination of the nature of the action. The Armco court, moreover, rejected as “faulty” Armco’s argument that the measure of damages to the environment is simply the cost of restoration, regardless of whether a plaintiff sues for damages. In rejecting this argument, the Fourth Circuit cited Peewyhouse v. Garland Coal &

94. Id. For other cases discussing the seventh amendment analysis in conjunction with CERCLA cases, see United States v. Dickerson, 640 F. Supp. 448, 453 (D. Md. 1986), and United States v. Mottolo, 605 F. Supp. 898, 913 (D.N.H. 1985).
96. Armco, 822 F.2d at 1354.
97. Id. at 1352.
98. Id. This technical definition distinguishes damages from claims for equitable (i.e., injunctive or restitutionary) relief, and, according to the Fifth Circuit in Hanna, includes “only payments to third persons when those persons have a legal claim for damages . . . .” Aetna Casualty & Sur. Co. v. Hanna, 224 F.2d 499, 503 (5th Cir. 1955); see supra notes 55-70 and accompanying text.
99. Armco, 822 F.2d at 1352-54.
100. Id. at 1355.
101. Id. at 1352.
102. Id. at 1353. Armco’s argument relied on United States Aviex Co. v. Travelers Ins. Co., 125 Mich. App. 579, 336 N.W.2d 838 (1983), a decision that the Fourth Circuit dismissed as unpersuasive. Id.; see supra notes 70-82 and accompanying text.
Mining Co. in support of the proposition that the method used to calculate a damages remedy differs from that used to calculate restitution. The Armco court also noted that, from a prudential standpoint, public policy requires that insureds pay for preventative measures themselves because of both the potential for abuse and the tendency for the insured to overspend the insurance carrier's money on safety precautions.

Looking at the damages issue from the vantage point of an insurance company, the court went even further in terming the CERCLA costs "prophylactic," while noting that the case at bar did not involve harm to humans or to the environment, but instead merely involved preventing such harm.

By coming down squarely in the corner of insurers, the Armco decision created precedent that fueled the fire in the battle between insurers and insureds over CGL policy interpretation in the CERCLA arena.

2. NEPACCO I and II

The next CERCLA case involving the interpretation of the damages provision in a CGL policy by a federal circuit court was Continental Insurance Co. v. Northeastern Pharmaceutical & Chemical Co., known as "NEPACCO I," and its counterpart "NEPACCO II." The insurer instigated the NEPACCO litigation, seeking a declaratory judgment holding that the insurer was not obligated under its CGL policy to defend or to indemnify the insured chemical producers for liability arising out of CERCLA actions. Northeastern Pharmaceutical & Chemical Company (NEPACCO) produced the chemical hexachlorophene, of which the hazardous chemical dioxin is a byproduct. NEPACCO hired a company to dispose of the dioxin; however, without NEPACCO's knowledge the company illegally dumped the dioxin on roadways. Initially, in NEPACCO I, the Eighth Circuit in a two-to-one panel decision adopted the view that cleanup costs under CERCLA do constitute damages within the meaning of CGL policies.

103. 382 P.2d 109 (Okla. 1962), cert. denied, 375 U.S. 906 (1963). The Armco court cited Peevyhouse as support for the general proposition that the cost of restoration is not simply the measure of damages to the environment. Armco, 822 F.2d at 1353; see supra note 104 for a discussion of Peevyhouse.

104. Armco, 822 F.2d at 1353. In Peevyhouse the court applied a diminution in value approach to measure damages rather than the cost of repairing strip-mined land. Peevyhouse, 382 P.2d at 112-14. The Peevyhouses had specifically bargained for and included a clause in the strip-mining agreement that required Garland Coal to restore the land after mining. The Oklahoma Supreme Court refused to enforce this clause, noting that the cost of repairing the strip-mined land to its original condition was more than four times its fair market value in the restored condition. Id. at 111.

105. Armco, 822 F.2d at 1353-54.

106. Id.

107. 811 F.2d 1180 (8th Cir. 1987), rev'd on rehearing en banc, 842 F.2d 977 (8th Cir. 1988).


109. Some of the toxic dioxin was spread on the roads of Times Beach, Missouri, forcing the government to purchase the entire town, expending $33.7 million dollars from the Superfund. NEPACCO I, 811 F.2d at 1182.

110. Id. at 1189.
The Eighth Circuit subsequently granted a rehearing en banc, known as NEPACCO II, and reviewed the entire case. The second time around, in a five-to-three en banc decision, the court reversed the panel decision, adopting the reasoning of the Fourth Circuit in Armco and determining that CERCLA cleanup costs were outside the scope of the definition of damages in CGL policies. Stretching to address the damages issue on the merits, the Eighth Circuit determined that the issue was properly before the court, despite the fact that neither party raised the issue, since the American Insurance Association raised the argument in its amicus brief and the State of Missouri responded to the argument in its reply brief.

Noting that the case law divided sharply on the issue of the interpretation of damages in CGL policies, the Eighth Circuit nevertheless held that the term “damages” was not ambiguous when defined within the narrow confines of the insurance context. Adopting the Fourth Circuit logic almost verbatim, the NEPACCO II court held that Missouri law required the court to construe insurance provisions in terms of an ordinary layperson’s understanding. The court went on to state that based upon a lay insured’s understanding, damages could reasonably include all claims presented in a court of law for monetary damages. Nonetheless, the Eighth Circuit found the term “damages” unambiguous and held that the term “damages” in CGL policies refers only to legal damages, and not to cleanup costs. Relying on the old distinction between equity and law and virtually tracking the Fourth Circuit’s arguments in the Armco case, the majority in NEPACCO II simply reiterated and adopted the strict interpretation of damages covered by CGL policies.

3. Cincinnati Insurance Co. v. Milliken

Following the NEPACCO II decision by the Eighth Circuit, the Fourth Circuit cemented its position in Cincinnati Insurance Co. v. Milliken. The Milliken case landed before the court on an appeal from a judgment relieving Cincinnati Insurance Company from liability to defend or to indemnify the insured in an action brought by the government seeking recovery of costs

111. See NEPACCO II, 842 F.2d at 977.
112. Id. at 987.
113. Id. at 984. The NEPACCO II majority noted the appropriateness of addressing the damages issue because “the broad issue of the availability of liability coverage under standard-form CGL policies for the costs of cleaning up hazardous waste sites is a question of substantial importance not only to liability insurers and their insureds, but to the public as well.” Id. at 985.
114. Id.
115. Id.
116. Id.
117. Id.
118. Id. For an indication of the strong split in authority on this issue, see id. at 977, 987-90 (Heaney, J., dissenting). In his dissenting opinion Judge Heaney accused the majority of completely disregarding established Missouri law by interpreting “damages” in terms of its technical, legalistic connotation. Id.
119. 857 F.2d 979 (4th Cir. 1988).
pursuant to CERCLA.120 Noting that the CERCLA provision relied upon was identical to the one relied upon in the Armco case, the Fourth Circuit construed, as a matter of law, the CERCLA provisions as a form of equitable relief, namely restitution.121 Conclusively characterizing the term "damages" as unambiguous, the Fourth Circuit summarily held that, under South Carolina law, damages means legal damages and that CGL policies absolutely do not cover CERCLA-related cleanup costs.122

4. District Court Cases.

Several recent district courts sided with the view that damages under CGL policies do not include CERCLA-type relief.123 The most recent case addressing the issue, Travelers Indemnity Co. v. Allied-Signal, Inc.,124 heightened the uncertainty in the area of interpretation of damages. Noting that it was bound by the Fourth Circuit precedents in Armco and Milliken, the Maryland federal district court stated, nonetheless, that if it were not bound, the court would certify the question to the Maryland Court of Appeals based on the principle of federalism because the issue concerned state law and states have an overriding interest in the resolution of the conflict.125 The district court, moreover, urged the Fourth Circuit to certify the issue when the case came up on appeal.126

The Travelers court gave two reasons for the appropriateness of certification to the state appellate court that depict the depth of the controversy over the issue.127 First, the court noted that basic public policy issues formed the foundation of the legal questions presented.128 In light of such pressing public policy issues, the state whose policy was affected by the decisions should resolve the issue.129 The district court then focused on one of the problems associated with such a lack of uniformity in this area: the problem of forum shopping.130 The court hinted that the insurance company in the case had instigated the action partly in order to obtain the benefit of favorable Fourth

120. The government based its prayer for relief upon CERCLA, 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a)(4)(A) (1988), which allows the government to maintain an action for "all costs of removal or remedial action incurred by the United States." Id.
121. Milliken, 857 F.2d at 980.
122. Id. at 981.
125. Id. at 1256.
126. Id.
127. Id.
128. Id.
129. Id.
130. Id.
Circuit law. Even though the Travelers court held that CERCLA costs were not damages, the court apparently did so reluctantly, emphasizing the on-going legal struggle between legal scholars, insureds and insurers.

B. The Other Side of the Debate: Cleanup Costs are “Damages”

I. Avondale Industries v. Travelers Indemnity

The Second Circuit, in Avondale Industries v. Travelers Indemnity Co., recently became the first federal circuit to hold that cleanup costs are “damages” giving rise to an insurer’s duty to defend under CGL policies. Avondale involved an appeal from the district court judgment granting partial summary judgment in an action for declaratory relief instituted by Avondale Industries. The judgment held that Travelers had a duty to defend Avondale in litigation instituted by the State of Louisiana seeking cleanup of a site contaminated, in part, by Avondale’s disposal of hazardous waste products.

Applying New York law, the Second Circuit held that the term “damages” in a CGL policy included remedial damages incurred in hazardous waste cleanup. The Avondale court expressly rejected the Fourth and Eighth Circuits’ reasoning in Armco and NEPACCO, respectively, and also rejected Travelers’ argument that New York law did not allow recovery of cleanup costs under CGL policies. The court noted that the CGL policy at issue did not include a definition of “damages” and concluded that without a limiting definition of the term, the policy should be construed to cover equitable cleanup costs. Although the Avondale case did not specifically address the insurer’s duty to indemnify, and the holding is limited to a duty to defend situation, the case nevertheless establishes a persuasive

131. Id.
132. Id.
133. 887 F.2d 1200 (2d Cir. 1989).
134. Id. at 1205-07.
135. Id. at 1202-03.
136. Id. at 1206-07.
137. Id.; see NEPACCO II, 842 F.2d 977, 985-87 (8th Cir.) (cleanup costs do not constitute damages), cert. denied, 109 S. Ct. 66, 102 L. Ed. 2d 43 (1988); Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco, Inc., 822 F.2d 1348, 1352-54 (4th Cir. 1987) (cleanup costs not covered under CGL policy). For a discussion of NEPACCO II and Armco, see supra notes 85-118
138. Avondale, 887 F.2d at 1207.
139. Id. The Avondale court noted that “viewed from the insured’s perspective, we think an ordinary businessman reading this [CGL] policy would have believed himself covered for the demands and potential damage claims now being asserted . . . particularly absent any specific exclusionary language in the policy.” Id.

The duty to defend rests solely on whether the complaint in the underlying action contains any allegations that arguably or potentially bring the action within
2. Chesapeake Utilities v. American Home Assurance

Another recent case holding in favor of insureds is *Chesapeake Utilities Corp. v. American Home Assurance Co.* 141 Although the Federal District Court for the District of Maryland interpreted Maryland law, the court expressly refused to follow the Fourth Circuit precedent in *Armco*, claiming that the Fourth Circuit, in rendering an interpretation of damages, misinterpreted Maryland law. 142 The *Chesapeake* case involved two hazardous waste sites, one in Maryland and one in Delaware. 143 The insured, Chesapeake, operated a coal gas manufacturing facility at each site, which produced coal tar as a byproduct of the manufacturing process. The State of Maryland listed the Maryland facility as a potential hazardous waste site and demanded that Chesapeake test the soil and groundwater at the site for contamination. Chesapeake incurred costs for these tests as well as certain costs for cleanup directed by the State of Maryland. 144

The State of Delaware incurred its own expenses cleaning up and monitoring the Delaware site. Interestingly, neither Delaware nor Maryland brought a lawsuit against Chesapeake, 145 although Delaware apparently asserted claims against Chesapeake alleging liability under CERCLA and comparable state statutes. 146 The EPA also got involved at the Delaware site and threatened to hold Chesapeake liable for cleanup costs. 147

After Chesapeake's insurers refused to defend and indemnify Chesapeake on the claims, Chesapeake brought an action seeking declaratory relief and damages for costs incurred in the cleanup of the two facilities. The insurers moved for summary judgment using the familiar argument that cleanup activities are equitable remedies, not legal damages as contemplated by CGL policies. 148

Declining to accept the insurers invitation to follow *Armco*, 149 the *Chesapeake* court held that, under Maryland law, language in an insurance provision is ambiguous when a reasonable layperson would view the word as

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142. Id. at 558. In a footnote, the *Chesapeake* court noted that a federal appellate court's interpretation of state law is merely persuasive authority. Id. at 558 n.18.
143. The case also raised an interesting choice of law problem for the federal district court sitting in Delaware. The *Chesapeake* court determined that Maryland law governed the interpretation of the insurance policy for the Maryland site and Delaware law governed the Delaware site's policy. Id. at 555-58.
144. Id. at 554.
145. Id.
146. Id.
147. Id.
148. Id. at 555.
149. Id. at 558.
susceptible to more than one interpretation. Determining that the outcome of the motions for summary judgment depended upon whether the court construed the term “damages” as ambiguous, and noting that the CGL policies failed to define the term, the court held that a definition of damages such as the one the insurer’s had offered—a definition based upon the traditional legal distinction between equity and law—would not be in accord with the understanding of a reasonable lay person.

Concluding that the insured’s definition of damages encompassing equitable and legal relief was at least one reasonable interpretation of the word, the Chesapeake court resoundingly rejected the insurer’s legalistic, technical definition of damages. With respect to the Delaware site, the Chesapeake court followed its own recent precedent in New Castle County v. Hartford Accident & Indemnity Co. In the year preceding the Chesapeake case, the court in New Castle held that under Delaware law the term “damages” included cleanup costs and equitable-type remedies unless the insurance policy itself specifically defined the term to the contrary. While acknowledging the divided authority among the courts on this issue, the Chesapeake court recognized that a trend in case law was emerging that rejected Armco’s reasoning.

3. Intel v. Hartford

The San Jose division of the Northern District of California recently joined the trend towards rejecting the Armco reasoning in Intel Corp. v. Hartford Accident & Indemnity Co. Intel Corporation, a manufacturer of semiconductors, stored certain hazardous substances utilized in its manufacturing processes in an underground storage tank on the site of its manufacturing facility. After moving to a larger facility, Intel conducted soil sampling and testing of the old site, apparently at the request of a potential tenant. The tests indicated that the site was contaminated by toxic substances in the soil and groundwater. Upon verifying the results of the tests, Intel undertook cleanup efforts and subsequently entered into a Consent De-

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150. Id. at 559.
151. Id. at 560 (citing Pacific Indem. Co. v. Interstate Fire & Casualty Co., 302 Md. 383, 488 A.2d 486, 488 (1985)).
152. Id. The Chesapeake court expounded on the dichotomy of the Fourth Circuit’s analysis in Armco, which noted that on the one hand that the standard under Maryland law is that terms of insurance policies should be given the meaning a “reasonably prudent layperson would infer,” while on the other hand, a “legal, technical meaning” should be given to the term “damages.” Id.; see Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco, Inc., 822 F.2d 1348, 1352, 1354 (4th Cir. 1987).
155. Id. at 560.
with the EPA and other PRPs. Intel's insurance carrier denied coverage, and Intel filed suit against the insurer alleging a myriad of claims. The sole issue presented in Intel, however, was whether the cleanup costs Intel incurred were within the scope of coverage under its CGL policy, a matter of first impression for a court applying California law.

After determining that a "case and controversy" existed, the Intel court went on to review California law regarding the interpretation of insurance policies. In its analysis of California rules of construction, the court noted that California courts would construe an insurance policy against the drafter of the document. After determining that "property damage" to a third party had occurred, the court analyzed the meaning of damages within the framework of Intel's CGL policy. Recognizing the Fourth Circuit's holding in Armco, the Intel court criticized the Fourth Circuit's reliance on Hanna for a definition of damages, questioning why the court would choose to follow a definition from the 1950s in a Fifth Circuit opinion that...

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157. CERCLA, as modified by the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA), permits potentially responsible parties to enter into consent decrees with the EPA whereby the parties agree upon a plan to cleanup a hazardous waste site. 42 U.S.C. § 9617 (1988). SARA added a notice requirement to CERCLA, providing that the EPA must publish a notice of a remedial plan prior to its adoption. Id. The publication must allow for a reasonable opportunity for public commentary. Id. After the adoption of a consent decree, the EPA again must make the plan available to the public. Id.

158. In the Consent Decree, the EPA stipulated that the cleanup work was performed consistent with the NCP and that "all costs reasonably incurred for such work are necessary costs of response. Intel, 692 F. Supp. at 1174. The Decree also noted that the purpose of the work being done was to "further evaluate, prevent or minimize the release or ... threatened release ... of hazardous substances to the environment and to protect the public health and welfare and the environment." Id. (quoting Consent Decree between EPA and Intel).

159. The complaint included allegations of "fraud, deceit, intentional and negligent misrepresentation, breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty, tortious breach of implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing, breach of insurer's statutory duties, civil conspiracy, and, of course, violation of the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act ("RICO") ..." Id. at 1175.

160. Id.
161. Id. at 1172.
162. Id. at 1175-76.
163. Id. at 1181-82.

164. Id. The court thoroughly analyzed the California rules of insurance policy interpretation. Id. at 1181-82. For a discussion of the basic tenets of insurance contract interpretation, see supra note 44.

165. The Intel court conducted a thorough analysis of an exclusionary clause in the CGL policy, which read "this insurance does not apply ... (k) to property damage (1) to property owned or occupied or rented to the insured ..." Intel, 692 F. Supp. at 1181-85. The court rejected Hartford's argument that the CGL policy did not apply because the property damage in question related to Intel's own property and did not involve third party property damage as required by the exclusionary clause. Id. The Intel court held that, "by polluting the ground water, Intel has damaged the property of all Californians." Id. at 1183. For a further analysis of pollution exclusion clauses in insurance policies, see Tyler & Wilcox, Pollution Exclusion Clauses: Problems in Interpretation and Application Under the Comprehensive General Liability Policy, 17 IDAHO L. REV. 497 (1981).

166. See Intel, 692 F. Supp. at 1186.

167. Aetna Casualty & Sur. Co. v. Hanna, 224 F.2d 499, 503 (5th Cir. 1955) (defining damages as "payments to third parties when those persons have a legal claim for damages").
severely constricted the scope of insurance coverage.\textsuperscript{168} The \textit{Intel} court then held that in a diversity case a federal court should apply the law of the forum regarding the definition of damages.\textsuperscript{169} Citing a long line of authority and noting a sharp contrast between case law on the issue of the interpretation of damages, \textit{Intel} noted that the clear trend of judicial authority was in accord with the view that cleanup costs were damages within the scope of a CGL policy.\textsuperscript{170}

The \textit{Intel} court interjected a significant new argument into the analysis of cleanup costs as damages under CGL policies. The court argued that cleanup costs actually equate with mitigation of damages.\textsuperscript{171} In a thorough analysis of the principle of mitigation of damages in California, the court specifically pointed to the fact that the California Water Code\textsuperscript{172} explicitly contains a mitigation of damages provision.\textsuperscript{173} The court went on to analyze

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Intel}, 692 F. Supp. at 1187. The \textit{Intel} court criticized the \textit{Hanna} damages definition as “a tautology defining damages as payments to a person who 'has a legal claim' for damages.” \textit{Id.} at 1187 n.21 (citing Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco, Inc., 822 F.2d 1348, 1352 (4th Cir. 1987)).

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Id.} at 1187-88.


\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Intel}, 692 F. Supp. at 1190.

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{See} CAL. WATER CODE § 13350 (West 1971).

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Intel}, 692 F. Supp. at 1189. According to the \textit{Intel} court, CAL. WATER CODE...
the mitigation principle in the context of California insurance law.\textsuperscript{174}

Analogizing to a California case in which a California appellate court allowed an insured to recover under a CGL policy expenses incurred in preventing the spread of a fire,\textsuperscript{175} the \textit{Intel} court reasoned that a mitigation of damages analysis was applicable in the context of hazardous waste cleanup.\textsuperscript{176} Accordingly, the \textit{Intel} court reasoned that the California Supreme Court would consider the costs incurred by an insured in cleaning up and monitoring hazardous waste that is contaminating public resources as constituting damages covered by the terms of a CGL policy.\textsuperscript{177}

III. ANALYSIS: NO WINNERS

A. The Historical Context: Why Neither Party Should Shoulder the Burden Alone

When interpreting insurance contracts, courts attempt to uphold the parties’ intentions and give the parties the benefit of their bargain.\textsuperscript{178} Courts


\textsuperscript{175} Id. at 1191-92 (quoting \textit{Globe}, 43 Cal. App. 3d at 751-52, 118 Cal. Rptr. at 79-80).

\textsuperscript{177} See supra note 43 for a discussion of the rules of insurance policy interpretation.
run into difficulty when attempting to apply this concept to CGL coverage of CERCLA-mandated environmental cleanup costs because neither the insurer nor the insured bargained for the policy with hazardous waste cleanup in mind. Environmental legislation like CERCLA, passed only in 1980, had no similar counterpart in the 1960s and 1970s. At the time most of these CGL policies were issued, hazardous substance technology was in its infancy and environmental law was not yet a legal specialty. Since the CGL policies at issue do not contain a definition of damages that restricts policy coverage to damages at law, the courts should not, in fairness, impose a retroactive, highly technical meaning of the term “damages” that in no way comports with the ordinarily understood meaning of the word. According to the understanding of an ordinary insured, CGL policies should cover cleanup costs as damages.

On the other hand, insurance carriers analyzed and calculated risks in the same historical context and were as unaware and unable to predict the advent of hazardous waste cleanup expenses as the insureds. Even had the insurance carriers foreseen the emergence of these environmental problems, the gravity of cleanup actions today was at the time unimaginable. Insurance carriers presumed that they had calculated necessary risks and charged sufficient premiums under the policies they issued. The carriers did not take the debilitating financial costs of hazardous waste cleanup into consideration in arriving at these figures. The insurers did not calculate the

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179. See infra notes 184-191 and accompanying text.
181. See supra note 43.
183. Id.
185. See id. at 87.
186. Id. at 87-88.
187. Id. Cheek explains that:
Insurers of general liability contracts written in the decades prior to CERCLA could not have foreseen the statute’s 1980 enactment and its attendant economic consequences; thus, they did not factor these costs into their prices and reserve calculations. Rather, until recently, insurers had no experience whatsoever with waste cleanup costs, and thus had no reserves for CERCLA liabilities established under any policy written prior to its enactment.
risks, nor charge premiums, with this enormously expensive problem in mind.\textsuperscript{188}

Both parties historically took steps they considered sufficient to protect themselves in the market place. Insured corporations bought liability insurance to protect themselves from liability stemming from their own negligence in causing third-party property damage.\textsuperscript{189} Now, facing the crisis of liability in the environmental arena, both sides face potential financial destruction as a result of environmental liability.\textsuperscript{190} With responsible parties facing bankruptcy,\textsuperscript{191} as a practical matter some hazardous waste facilities will go unremedied. The current state of affairs with insureds and insurers fighting it out in the courtroom creates additional problems, including masking the true problem: How can the system clean up all of the toxic sites while keeping businesses and insurance carriers solvent?

\section*{B. Problems Created by the Current System}

\subsection*{1. A Flood of Litigation: Burdens on the Legal System}

Although cleanup is essential to counter imminent threats to the environment, no one seems to agree on who should pay for these enormous remedial actions. In a climate of self-preservation, neither insureds nor insurers admit responsibility. Thus, litigation is permeating the courtroom, pitting insured against insurer.\textsuperscript{192} Obviously the litigation covering the duty to defend and to indemnify is a costly exercise for both insurers and insureds.\textsuperscript{193} Just as important, the litigation impacts taxpayers, as these complex cases consume ever-increasing amounts of judicial resources. With respect to the duty to defend cases in particular, it seems ludicrous to expend such a large amount of money in complex litigation merely to determine who foots the bill for the next round of costly complex litigation.\textsuperscript{194} These massive expenditures reduce the amount of resources available to remedy environmental problems.

\textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Id.} Cheek notes:

The normal practice in the insurance industry is to build anticipated reserve requirements into the premiums charged in a given line of insurance. Actual reserves are then established on a case-by-case basis, with the amounts involved taxed against premiums collected during the year in which the accident giving rise to the case occurred. In this manner, the industry is usually able to determine, within a reasonable period of time, whether its original anticipated reserve requirements were accurately calculated.

\textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{189} See \textit{Taking the Insurers}, supra note 24, at 1110 (CGL policies were designed to cover third-party property damage resulting from negligent acts or omissions of insured).

\textsuperscript{190} The average cost of complying with EPA-ordered cleanup stands at $9.2 million dollars per CERCLA site. \textit{See Cheek, supra note 184, at 81.} This estimate may exceed $10 million when legal fees and transactional costs are included. \textit{Id.} at 81 n.25.

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{See infra} note 216 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{192} \textit{See cases cited supra} note 170.

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{See Cheek, supra} note 184, at 81 n.25 (legal fees and transactional costs involved in CERCLA litigation often exceed $1 million dollars per site).

\textsuperscript{194} For an example of complex, protracted environmental litigation, see United States v. Conservation Chem. Co., 653 F. Supp. 152 (W.D. Mo. 1986), which spawned related litigation in Maryland Casualty Co. v. Armco, Inc., 822 F.2d 1348 (4th Cir. 1987).
Not only is this never-ending cycle of litigation outrageously expensive, but it also consumes time that, in many cases, delays cleanup of toxic substances and increases the likelihood and severity of an environmental disaster. This increased likelihood of disaster, in turn, exposes both the insured and the insurer to an increasing risk that personal injury will result from the contamination, exposing both to more liability.

2. A Load of Complications: Burdens on Commercial Transactions

The unpredictability and the lack of uniformity in the legal arena spills over into the arena of business transactions. In the mergers and acquisitions context, environmental due diligence reviews have become commonplace. In addition, environmental assessments are necessary in the commercial lending context. Possible liability for cleanup costs is a serious problem facing a lending institution when it accepts as collateral property that could be contaminated. A bank’s minimal participation in the management of a company can render it liable as an “owner or operator” PRP under CERCLA. Because of the threat of future liability, lenders often deny loans when an environmental analysis reveals even small amounts of contamination on property offered as collateral. On the other side of the real estate transaction, prospective purchasers of land must, as a practical matter, conduct an exhaustive environmental analysis to avoid potential CERCLA liability as a result of prior contamination. A good environmental audit requires both a team of experts to examine records, interview employees, and...

195. See Cheek, supra note 184, at 95 (“The faster these threats to public health and the environment are removed or neutralized, the fewer the claims that will have to be paid for exposure to these sites.”)

196. Id.


200. See 42 U.S.C. § 9607 (1988). A lender would not usually be a PRP unless classified as an “owner or operator.” See infra note 199, at 89. CERCLA contains a specific exception that protects lenders during the life of a loan because “[t]he term ‘owner or operator’... does not include a person, who, without participating in the management of a vessel or facility, holds indicia of ownership primarily to protect his security interest in the vessel or facility.” 42 U.S.C. § 9601(20)(A) (1988).

Once a case, however, has found a lender liable for cleanup costs as an “owner or operator” under CERCLA. See United States v. Maryland Bank & Trust Co., 632 F. Supp. 573, 579 (D. Md. 1986) (bank was owner or operator despite lender exception in CERCLA when bank foreclosed on garbage dump and purchased property at foreclosure sale).


202. See Leifer & Reich, Effect of CERCLA on Property Transfers, 322 PRAC. L. INST., THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS ON BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS 199, 206 (1988). Leifer and Reich state that prospective purchasers should take the following steps to minimize the likelihood of CERCLA liability: “(1) conduct a through review of the history of
inspect the facility, and competent legal counsel to analyze the implications of the findings.\textsuperscript{203} This practical requirement greatly increases the cost of business transactions.

The toxic tort litigation creates an even more tenuous situation for insurance carriers. Due to both the crisis situation in the insurance industry resulting from multimillion dollar judgments for liability in the toxic tort area\textsuperscript{204} and the uncertainty of the environmental arena, businessmen are increasingly unable to obtain insurance to cover environmental risks.\textsuperscript{205} Until the legal issues involved in the hazardous waste litigation are resolved, insurance carriers will be unable to predict risks and will be forced either to stop selling environmental insurance or to sell it at premiums well above the rate businessmen and city governments can afford to pay.\textsuperscript{206} These high premiums will eventually price businesses out of the pollution insurance market altogether.\textsuperscript{207}

3. \textit{A Race to the Courthouse: Forum Shopping and Preemptive Filings}

In addition to burdening commercial transactions, the environmental litigation over insurance coverage of cleanup costs has severe negative effects on the legal system. The lack of uniformity in court decisions fosters forum shopping and preemptive filings.\textsuperscript{208} With the courts so sharply divided, both insured and insurer are making a mad dash to the courthouse to file an action in a jurisdiction that will render a favorable result.\textsuperscript{209} Since CERCLA actions involve federal statutes, and many of the businesses and insurance companies conduct affairs in numerous states, making diversity a basis for
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jurisdiction, federal courts frequently become the forums adjudicating the insurance coverage cases, even though the cases involve essentially state law issues.210 Although federal courts interpreting insurance contracts must construe the state law that governs the insurance contracts,211 the outcome regarding coverage ultimately rests upon the court's determination of whether a particular clause is ambiguous.212 Once a court determines the ambiguity question, the result naturally flows.213 Courts generally hold that unambiguous insurance policies do not cover cleanup costs, while ambiguous policies do.214 Application of the standards for determining ambiguity necessarily involves a certain degree of unpredictable judicial discretion.

With circuits divided over the issue of insurance policy coverage of cleanup costs, the party who preempts the other by instigating litigation in a favorable forum essentially wins, while a party who is preempted loses. This happens even though the losing party with the same fact scenario before a different court would win. This disparity of result, while inherently unfair, also as a practical matter prompts the filing of lawsuits in the parties' efforts to get favorable law applied. Encouraging preemptive filing, moreover, increases the likelihood that unripe cases or cases based on trumped-up, frivolous, or groundless charges will reach a court. This increase in potentially meritless litigation burdens an already overworked court system.

C. The Real Problem

The current state of affairs has created burdens for both commercial transactions and the legal system. Courts and commentators alike have at-


212. All cases that have held that cleanup costs are damages covered under CGL policies first determined that the applicable insurance provisions were vague. See cases cited supra note 170.

213. See supra note 212.

tempted to solve the environmental crisis by holding either the insurance carrier or the insured solely liable for the cleanup of hazardous waste sites. Framing the solution in terms of requiring either the insured or the insurer to shoulder the entire financial burden fails to go far enough into the analysis of this complex problem. Saddling either side with the entire burden will force some insurance carriers or corporations into bankruptcy. The duty under the CGL policy to defend and to indemnify insureds carries with it enormous implications in the environmental context. Cleaning up all of the toxic waste sites that currently exist will cost billions or trillions of dollars. Despite a strong temptation to look to insurance carriers as the “deep pockets,” the insurance industry cannot shoulder the entire financial burden of these cleanup operations without some carriers going into bankruptcy. Likewise, the business and industry sector is unable to foot the entire bill because the enormity of the costs will drive at least some of the parties into bankruptcy.

Placing the entire burden either on insurance carriers or on business and industry, therefore, will threaten the parties with financial destruction. From a societal standpoint, forcing businesses or insurance companies to seek the protection of bankruptcy is undesirable. Practically, if the responsible parties go into bankruptcy, they will be unable to finance the cleanup operations and thus carry out the purpose of CERCLA to rid the environment of hazardous waste.

D. The Real Solution: Revamp CERCLA

CERCLA created a strict liability system, primarily concerned with expeditious cleanup and only secondarily with ascribing fault. Because a lame duck Congress enacted CERCLA in the closing days of the 1980 congressional session, the legislation is essentially a compromise. CERCLA has been very effective in its prospective application, as business people apparently are more carefully disposing of toxic waste and more diligently assessing environmental implications in business transactions.

The problems with CERCLA lies in its retroactive application to previously created toxic waste sites. At the time when business and industry generated and disposed of this hazardous waste, they did so without the benefit

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215. See Cheek, supra note 184, at 81 n.25. Cheek predicted that the cleanup cost per site could rise to as much as $30 to $50 million as a result of more stringent cleanup standards promulgated in SARA (Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986). Id. at 81. See 42 U.S.C. § 9617 (1988).

216. According to Cheek: “If insurance coverage is found not to cover such [cleanup] costs, many [hazardous] site owners will be forced into bankruptcy. If insurance companies must cover all such liabilities, they too will be bankrupted.” Cheek, supra note 184, at 75.

217. Id.


219. See S. REP. No. 848, 96th Cong., 2d Sess. 3 (1980) (purpose of CERCLA is to facilitate quick cleanups without regard to fault; fault can be ascribed later).

220. C. CHADD & L. BERGESON, GUIDE TO AVOIDING LIABILITY FOR WASTE DISPOSAL 27 (1986).

221. For a discussion of environmental assessments in the context of commercial transactions, see supra notes 197-203 and accompanying text.
CERCLA or other in-depth environmental legislative guidelines.\textsuperscript{222} CERCLA's statutory establishment of PRPs fails to apportion liability equitably among the responsible parties. CERCLA allows one responsible party to be held solely liable for cleaning up a hazardous site,\textsuperscript{223} merely affording a statutory right to institute a subsequent action for contribution.\textsuperscript{224} The statutory scheme thus allows the EPA to force one party to fund the entire cleanup operation without the help of other responsible parties.

Because the current scheme of CERCLA does not provide for burden-sharing sufficient to facilitate the cleanup of all of the toxic sites, Congress must step in and solve this problem. One commentator recently suggested that to solve the environmental problem, all CGL insurance carriers should indemnify their insureds for CERCLA cleanup costs.\textsuperscript{225} By balancing the social usefulness of the insurance industry against the interests of insureds in receiving unexpected benefits of their CGL policies, the commentator determined that the insurance industry should be the loser.\textsuperscript{226} This Comment recognized that carrying the entire financial burden of cleaning up the hazardous waste facilities will force some insurance carriers into bankruptcy;\textsuperscript{227} the author, however, insists that the government will step in and provide coverage if the insurance companies become bankrupt.\textsuperscript{228} Forcing insurance carriers into bankruptcy is justified by the predicted result of such an occurrence: insurance coverage will simply become more expensive, unfortunate companies will go bankrupt, and the government will subsidize insurance guaranty associations.\textsuperscript{229}

In light of the social usefulness of insurance companies as a method for businesses to protect themselves from financially ruinous liability and in light of the severe economic problems facing our nation in the budgeting and deficit areas, the commentator's justifications are unpersuasive. The taxpayers and the federal government simply cannot afford to subsidize yet another failed industry. Business people, moreover, need to be able to purchase insurance at reasonable rates in order to protect themselves. The real problem with this commentator's analysis lies in the fact that he merely balances the interests of insureds and insurers and chooses which side he thinks should be forced into bankruptcy. A better approach would be to balance the potential harm of the environmental problem and the probability of a serious loss due to the environmental problem against the cost of foisting the solution on only one segment of society. In balancing the very real threat to the general health and welfare of society from toxic waste against forcing business or insurance carriers into bankruptcy, the latter form of analysis also ironically

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{222}]{\textit{See supra} note 180 and accompanying text.}
\item[\textsuperscript{223}]{42 U.S.C. § 9607 (1988).}
\item[\textsuperscript{224}]{\textit{Id.}}
\item[\textsuperscript{226}]{\textit{Id.}}
\item[\textsuperscript{227}]{\textit{Id.}}
\item[\textsuperscript{228}]{\textit{Id.}}
\item[\textsuperscript{229}]{\textit{Id.}}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
ensures that some sites will go unremedied because the responsible party is insolvent.

Under a public policy analysis, Congress clearly needs to revise CERCLA to distribute the costs of retroactive cleanups equitably among the parties in a manner that attempts to preserve the solvency of both and provides for the cleanup of all of the hazardous waste facilities. Congress should provide that CGL insurance carriers who issued policies during the 1966-1973 period share liability for the environmental cleanup with industries and governments engaged in toxic-related enterprises. This goal could be accomplished by requiring potentially responsible insureds and their insurance carriers to divide evenly the costs of cleaning up the toxic wastes. Sharing the costs would increase the probability that sites would be remedied because, from a practical standpoint, combined resources form a larger fund than one side's resources can create alone.

A compromise solution is necessary in the face of such a difficult issue. With the circuit courts divided on the issue and with strong arguments abounding on both sides of the debate, Congress should step in and adopt compromise legislation that allocates the financial burden among the parties. Admittedly, formulating the specifics of such a compromise is a difficult task. Congress, however, could adjust the exact allocation of costs to each side to shift a larger part of the burden to one side or to the other as needed. Regardless of the exact ratio Congress chooses, the parties should have to share the burden of ridding the environment of toxic waste. This Comment does not attempt to recommend a detailed compromise plan. Rather, this Comment advocates a broad solution and offers an analytical framework for resolving this problem. Congress should attack the difficult issue and find some way to allocate the costs of cleanup among the CGL insurance carriers and the insureds.

IV. Conclusion

Litigation surrounding insurance carriers' duty to defend and to indemnify their insureds under Comprehensive General Liability policies in hazardous waste cleanup actions has sparked a heated debate and a fundamental split among courts, commentators, the government, and the parties to the CGL insurance policies. Faced with the prospect of financially debilitating cleanup costs, insureds are looking to the insurance companies to fund the necessary remedial action. Unwilling to accept the burden, both insurance companies and insureds alike are opting for protracted litigation as a means of postponing the inevitable.

With the lack of consensus and the split in authority over the issue of policy coverage of environmental cleanup costs, both sides are engaging in preemptive filing and forum shopping in the hope of obtaining favorable rul-

230. Pursuant to the McCarran-Ferguson Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1012 (1988), the states normally have the exclusive power to regulate the business of insurance. To the extent, however, that the states are not regulating a particular facet of the insurance business, McCarran-Ferguson does not prohibit federal regulation. Id.
ings. The lack of uniformity in judicial decisions renders prudent business planning difficult, if not impossible, for both insurance carriers and their insureds. The current climate of insecurity and unpredictability discourages cleanup efforts because neither party can confidently assess its potential liability.

Until courts begin to resolve the conflicts among themselves and reach uniform decisions, the litigious trend will continue, with the winner, if such it can be called, being the party who runs fastest to a favorable courthouse. The environmental litigation arena presents a quagmire of complex problems for a legal system and business community premised upon the tenets of stability, predictability, and uniformity of decision. Congress, therefore, must resolve the problem. By revamping CERCLA to apportion liability fairly among the CGL insurance carriers that wrote policies between 1966 and 1973 and those industries that involve the generation, production, storage, or transportation of toxic substances, Congress could resolve this major issue. Until Congress revises CERCLA, insureds and insurers will continue to waste valuable time and money litigating CGL policy coverage issues, and hazardous waste sites will go unremedied. Congress must unite to solve the problems it overlooked in the creation of CERCLA.
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