

Environmental Group Of The Year: Bracewell

By **Adrian Cruz**

Law360 (February 23, 2026, 4:00 PM EST) -- Bracewell LLP attorneys successfully defended neoprene manufacturer Denka Performance Elastomer LLC from a government-ordered shutdown and prevailed in overturning a D.C. Circuit decision that blocked industry challenges to California vehicle emissions rules, earning the firm a place among the 2025 Law360 Environmental Groups of the Year.

Bracewell's environmental attorneys are primarily based out of Washington, D.C., and Texas. Practice chair Jason Hutt told Law360 that the team works on a wide range of environmental, natural resources and public land statute matters. He attributes continued success to a collaborative culture and an intentional decision to focus primarily on issues affecting the energy industry.

"Bracewell is not attempting to be all things to all people," Hutt said. "There's been a lot of bandying around with the term 'full-service law firm,' and we think we really do provide a full-service offering when it comes to the energy industry. What we have is a firm with a clientele where environmental issues are critical, and we have really built things up to ensure they're well-served with the best practitioners."

Hutt, who has been with Bracewell since the start of his legal career in 1998, was part of a team that successfully defended Denka, the nation's only producer of neoprene, from a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency action looking to shut down the company's Louisiana plant. The **EPA said in 2023** that the plant poses an "imminent and substantial endangerment" to the public in ordering the cessation of operations under the Clean Air Act.

Over the next two years, the two sides were involved in litigation, rulemaking and government relations matters regarding the neoprene plant. One win came when a Fifth Circuit ruling blocked the EPA's efforts to override a two-year state rulemaking extension that gave Denka a longer period to comply with more stringent air toxin regulations. In March 2025, the EPA dropped the case with only about a month to go before trial.

Hutt said that from the start, the EPA's actions felt like "going out on a limb." He said the neoprene plant had reduced emissions by 85% and that it was strange for the agency to suddenly claim there was an emergency when there had been much higher levels of pollutants during the facility's four decades of operation.



"They dug into the idea that these emissions presented an imminent substantial endangerment, and frankly, the court never bought into that argument," Hutt said. "I think ultimately sort of heading into the trial and running the risk of losing that case and establishing that the EPA didn't have that authority, the officials chose to dismiss the case, which was a significant victory in what was a do-or-die fight for our client."

Bracewell attorneys also helped Valero Renewable Fuels Company LLC and Diamond Alternative Energy overturn a D.C. Circuit ruling that had blocked industry challenges to California vehicle emissions rules.

The U.S. Supreme Court determined in June that Valero and other companies had standing to contest the EPA's waiver allowing California to impose uniquely stringent electric vehicle quotas and greenhouse gas standards with nationwide impact. Hutt said the ruling was important to Valero, as it ensures the company can have its say regarding the implementation of regulations that could have a major impact on its business.

"There's a lot of economic consequences to the decisions made under that statute," Hutt said. "I don't know that they're tremendously environmentally impactful, but there's huge economic winners and losers based upon how the EPA sets the threshold, and it was important for Valero to have a seat at the table."

Outside regulatory work, Bracewell's environmental attorneys have been involved in transactional matters, such as representing Houston-based oil and gas company Par Pacific Holdings in the acquisition of five refineries and related assets over the past 12 years, including in an ongoing new-owner compliance audit of a former ExxonMobil refinery in Billings, Montana.

Timothy Wilkins, managing partner of the Austin, Texas, office and a member of the environmental practice group, joined Hutt in saying that one of the main areas of focus for the environmental team and its clients will be handling the impact of the Trump administration's various environmental policy shifts — ranging from a wholesale rejection or de-emphasis of issues such as climate change and environmental justice, to a decrease in federal enforcement matters compared with previous administrations.

"Anytime you have changes in direction, it creates real questions on the part of our clientele as to what to do in the face of this," Wilkins said. "There are a lot of things about the deregulatory agenda that feel like they would make less work, but are actually generating a great deal of work because people aren't 100% sure how to proceed in an environment that's this much in flux."

--Editing by Amy French.