



Product Liability

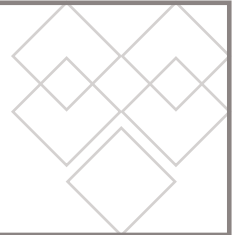
2024



PROFILED:

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Product Liability



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PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

Renee Smith is a Chambers-ranked litigation partner who represents clients facing high-profile complex products liability, class action and commercial litigation. She was recognised as a 2023 Law360 Product Liability MVP. She has secured trial defence verdicts and other wins for 3M, Abbott Labs, AbbVie Inc., Baxter Healthcare Corporation, Dow Chemical, Eli Lilly and Company, W.R. Grace, General Motors LLC, Juul Labs, Inc., Kobe Steel, Ltd. and PricewaterhouseCoopers. She has won jury trials in multiple federal multidistrict litigations, and other state and federal courts across the country.

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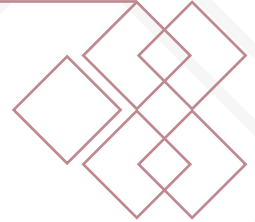
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Q&A WITH RENEE D. SMITH

**Could you describe your approach to tackling complex legal challenges? What principles or philosophies guide your work?**

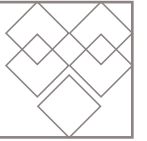
◆ I tackle complexity with simplicity. Distilling complicated facts, science and law to straightforward, common-sense concepts is a key guiding principle. Winning product liability cases often boils down to showing that any injury was not caused by a product and identifying another logical cause. Developing an early compelling narrative on these issues focuses the case from start – the first paragraph of the first brief – to finish – the last line of a trial closing argument. These anchors can contextualise and frame voluminous documents and data, while satisfying the human-nature, if not a legal, question, in most personal injury cases: if our product did not cause an injury, then what did? Fundamentally, we must give courts and jurors the comfort and confidence to find for our clients because it is the right thing to do. This simple message goes a long way in any case, even the most complex ones.

Reflecting on your career, how have your goals and aspirations evolved over time? Have there been any unexpected achievements or shifts in direction?

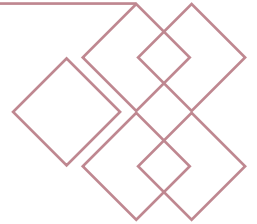
◆ My approach has evolved, as I, along with our profession, recognise there is no ‘one size fits all’ recipe for big law success. Providing the best representation for clients does not mean sacrificing our compassion and kindness. I follow these guiding lights. First, be human. Product liability cases involve real, often sympathetic, people with serious injuries or medical conditions. In these cases, navigating sensitive issues in the most respectful manner while mounting a vigorous defence helps build our client’s credibility in even the most challenging cases. And second, be

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reasonable. Courtesy and reasonableness are key components of fierce client advocacy, especially in complex long-running litigation. Building trust fosters friendships across the aisle and sets the stage for reciprocity. Reasonably resolving minor disputes gives our attorneys and our clients more credence with the court for the battles that matter, and ultimately sets the stage for success.

**How do you mentor and inspire younger colleagues within your firm? Can you share a success story of someone you have guided?**

◆ I mentor younger colleagues by sharing my unique experiences and encouraging them to pursue their own opportunities. First, for my own experience, I followed what at the time was an unconventional career path – stepping back to a part-time role while my children were young but then returning to full time and full partnership with Kirkland’s support. I am honoured that both women and men have cited my story as an inspiration to chart their own path to success even if it departs from traditional timing or sequencing. Second, supporting the next generation is a triple win – for our younger colleagues, who gain invaluable ‘on their feet’ experience, for our firm, which deepens its bench with experienced juniors, and for our clients, who are represented by some of the best advocates, regardless of age or seniority. They breathe fresh air into proceedings and often receive accolades from even the strictest of judges. ■

“WINNING PRODUCT LIABILITY CASES OFTEN BOILS DOWN TO SHOWING THAT ANY INJURY WAS NOT CAUSED BY A PRODUCT AND IDENTIFYING ANOTHER LOGICAL CAUSE.”

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REPRESENTATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

- ◆ Trial counsel in largest multidistrict litigation in history; secured complete defence verdict in bellwether case brought by army veteran alleging earplug caused hearing loss and tinnitus.
- ◆ Trial counsel for pharmaceutical company in nationwide litigation involving rheumatoid arthritis drug. Won motions to exclude experts and for summary judgment in federal and state courts involving serious personal injuries.
- ◆ Trial counsel in federal MDL and related state cases involving personal injury and class actions arising from automobile ignition switch recalls. Secured defence verdicts in three bellwether trials; won summary judgment and Daubert motions.
- ◆ Trial counsel and co-lead defence liaison counsel in multidistrict and related state cases brought by consumers, schools, attorney generals and municipalities.
- ◆ Won summary judgment for pharmaceutical company in multidistrict litigation involving alleged personal injuries related to weight loss drug.
- ◆ Counsel for pharmaceutical company in multidistrict litigation alleging obesity and diabetes medicine caused certain gastrointestinal conditions.

