Mixed Dust Claims - The Next Asbestos, or Much Ado About Nothing?

Douglas J. Giuliano
Comments

Mixed Dust Claims—The Next Asbestos, or Much Ado About Nothing?

Douglas J. Giuliano†

I. Introduction

A. A Brief Medical Explanation of Mixed-Dust Claims

B. Similarities Between Pneumoconiosis and Asbestos-Related Lung Diseases

II. Current State of the Law and Insurance

A. Case Law Dealing with Pneumoconiosis

B. Legislation Concerning Pneumoconiosis
   1. State Laws
   2. Federal Laws

C. Insurance Policies Dealing with Pneumoconiosis
   1. The Commercial General Liability Policy (CGL)
      a. Reasons for the Prevalence of Pollution Exclusion Clauses and How They Evolved Over Time
      b. Interpretative Issues Associated With Pollution Exclusion Clauses
      c. Legal Principles Pertaining to Insurance Interpretation
      d. Determining the Applicability of Pollution Exclusion Clauses to Particular Factual Situations
      e. The Meaning of “Pollutant” Within Pollution Exclusion Clauses
      f. Pollution Exclusion Clauses Relating to Environmental Pollution
   2. Potential Federal Legislation Dealing With Asbestos

† J.D., Florida International University College of Law; B.S. Business Management, Troy State University. Many thanks to FIU Law Professor Elizabeth P. Foley, who displayed infinite patience and wisdom while acting as my Law Review advisor, as well as to FIU Law Professors Andrew J. McClurg and Thomas E. Baker, both of whom were instrumental to the writing of this Comment and who never were too busy to answer my numerous questions. I am also grateful for the interesting ideas contributed by my colleagues Gabriel A. Couriel, Matthew P. Crow, and W. Dale Miller. Finally, I appreciate my family’s and friends’ attempts to understand the effort and time that this project demanded, and for putting up with me during the process.
1. Previous Failed Attempts by Congress to Pass Asbestos Legislation ........................................................................148
2. The FAIR Act .....................................................................................150

III. Potential Impact of Insurance Policy Exclusions and Asbestos Legislation Similar to the FAIR Act on the Number of Mixed-Dust Claims Filed ......................................................................................152
A. How Insurance Law as It Currently Stands Can Affect Asbestos Claims ........................................................................152
   1. Policies Containing Specific Asbestos Exclusion Clauses .........................................................................................152
   2. Possible Duties That Insurers Might Have in Relation to Mixed-Dust Claims Filed .......................................................154
   3. Applicability of Pollution Exclusion Clauses to Mixed-Dust Claims Alleging Asbestos .................................................156
   4. Effect of Pollution Exclusion Clauses on Mixed-Dust Claims Alleging at Least One Pollutant Within the Meaning of the Clause ..........................................................................................157
B. Possible Ramifications of Legislation Like the FAIR Act Being Passed .....................................................................................157

IV. Causation Issues in Mixed-Dust Claims .............................................................................................................................159
A. Basic Causation Issues Applicable to Mixed-Dust Claims ..................................................................................................159
B. Possible Evidentiary Burdens to Proving Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims .................................................................................163
C. Ways to Prove Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims ..................................................................................................................166
D. How Courts Have Handled Causation Issues in Mixed-Dust Claims .....................................................................................168
   1. Example of a Mixed-Dust Tort Case Dealing With Causation ........................................................................................168
   2. Example of a Workers’ Compensation Claim Involving Mixed-Dust ................................................................................169
E. Facilitating the Obstacle of Establishing Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims .....................................................................................170
   1. How Congress and Some States Have Eased the Causation Standard in Workers’ Compensation Claims ..................170
      a. Applicability of Existing Pneumoconiosis Statutes to Mixed-Dust Claims .................................................................171
   2. How Courts Have Relaxed the Method of Proving Causation in Certain Types of Lawsuits .........................................171
      a. Applicability of Causation Standards Used in Other Types of Toxic Tort Cases to Mixed-Dust Claims .............175
   3. Reducing or Eliminating the Problem of Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims By Using Settlements or Alternative Methods of Compensating Victims ......................................................176
      a. Using Settlements as an Alternative to Mixed-Dust Litigation ..................................................................................177
I. INTRODUCTION

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other would smell as sweet.\(^1\)

When William Shakespeare wrote these oft-repeated words around 1595,\(^2\) he undoubtedly would have been unaware of asbestos and mixed-dust claims, or perhaps even torts, for that matter. Thus, little could he have known that over four centuries later, crafty plaintiffs’ attorneys, eager to get around legislation and insurance policies that would purport to limit or altogether restrict asbestos lawsuits, would lend credence to Juliet’s soliloquy by disguising or molding asbestos cases as “mixed-dust” claims. Mixed-dust claims are nothing new; indeed, they have been brought with varied success since at least the early 1960s.\(^3\) However, because of the parallels between the contraction of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, which is a form of lung disease, and asbestos exposure, and because current or pending legislation, as well as insurance exclusion policies, can impact whether and how much a person may recover for asbestos-related illnesses, there may be a surge in the number of asbestos-related claims brought under the rubric of mixed-dust disease. This article will address that possibility by analyzing whether this would be possible under both the current and likely future state of the law, and if so, what some of the ensuing ramifications might be.

Part I of this Comment will provide a brief medical background of mixed-dust claims, namely in terms of what they are and how they are brought about. Included in this discussion will be an analysis of how and where mixed-dust diseases are typically contracted, as well as some of the varieties of the affliction and the physical effects that the diseases can have on those affected. Also in this section is an examination of asbestosis, a variation of pneumoconiosis that is caused by inhalation of asbestos particles.

\(^1\) WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, ROMEO AND JULIET act 2, sc. 2. (William Lyon Phelps ed., Yale Univ. Press 1923).
\(^2\) R. Moore, Romeo and Juliet: Introduction, Enotes.com, at http://www.allshakespeare.com/romeo.php?id=830 (last visited Feb. 17, 2006). The author, being mindful of the finicky nature of the Internet and its too-frequent ephemeral website addresses, has kept on file a copy of this Internet-derived source, along with all other such sources used throughout this paper.
In Part II, the current state of the law and insurance policies as it pertains to pneumoconiosis is explored. The author begins by examining some workers’ compensation claims involving both ordinary pneumoconiosis and mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, with an emphasis on how courts employ similar techniques in resolving such claims, including a highly deferential standard to lower tribunals’ factual determinations. The focus then shifts to state and federal statutes dealing with both ordinary and mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, including a discussion of some features mutually shared by these statutes. Also examined in this context is one state’s procedures for filing pneumoconiosis-related workers’ compensation claims, as well as the federal Black Lung Act, which establishes a compensation scheme for persons suffering from pneumoconiosis derived from inhaling coal dust.

Also in Part II is an exploration of insurance law as it applies to mixed-dust claims, particularly through a dissection of the type of insurance commonly secured by businesses known as a commercial general liability policy. The discussion begins by providing background information on some of the impetuses for insurers’ attempts to limit their liability in the context of tort claims through pollution exclusion clauses. The author then introduces some of the key interpretative issues that courts struggle with in dealing with the applicability of these policies to a particular set of circumstances, including what substances qualify as “pollutants” for purposes of pollution exclusion clauses. Following is an analysis of some of the most prevalent doctrines that courts employ in interpreting insurance policies, including a discussion of the similarities between how these and other types of cases involving “ordinary” contract disputes are resolved. This is accomplished largely by examining judicial opinions dealing with the applicability of pollution exclusion clauses in particular contexts, such as environmental pollution.

Finally, Part II concludes by addressing some of Congress’ attempts at finding a legislative solution to the asbestos litigation problem in America. Initially, the author examines several bills that never became law, such as the Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act of 1998 and the Asbestos Compensation Act of 2000. The focus is then shifted to Congress’ latest attempt at asbestos reform through the Fairness in Asbestos Resolution Act, or FAIR Act for short. To that end, some of the bill’s key aspects that might influence how or whether asbestos claims are filed, specifically as it relates to a possible increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed. Among these is the Act’s suppression of all conflicting state and federal laws, as well as the requirement that claimants be able to exclude substances other than asbestos as having caused their injuries for some types of claims.

Part III predicts how today’s and tomorrow’s insurance law, particularly ever-broadening pollution exclusion clauses, as well as possible future legislation dealing with asbestos, namely the FAIR Act, might impact the number of mixed-dust claims filed. In connection with the insurance aspect
of the query, special attention is given to exclusion clauses specifically dealing with asbestos, which are becoming increasingly common, as well as how those and other types of exclusion clauses affect the duties of insurance carriers in terms of defending or indemnifying claims. Also explored is the interesting question of what would occur if only one of the substances comprising a mixed-dust claim were found to be excluded under an applicable insurance policy.

As for the possible ramifications that legislation like the FAIR Act would have on the filing of mixed-dust claims, the author addresses the issue by focusing primarily on certain key aspects of the FAIR Act that might influence whether and how some asbestos plaintiffs might proceed. Among these are that the Act would serve as the only means by which persons suffering from asbestos-related ailments could file claims to receive compensation and that some claimants whose injuries were caused or influenced by substances other than asbestos might not be eligible for recovery under the Act.

Part IV is concerned with the role that causation could play in tort suits or workers’ compensation claims involving mixed-dust disease. The section begins by comparing the elements of causation that might be implicated in mixed-dust tort claims to those typically encountered in traditional toxic tort cases. Next is addressed some basic causation hurdles that mixed-dust tort plaintiffs are likely to face, including proving that they were exposed to toxic substances and that the exposure to those substances is what caused their illness. The author then explores, using the Federal Rules of Evidence as background, some of the principal evidentiary issues that mixed-dust plaintiffs might encounter in their attempts to introduce scientific and medical evidence pertinent to their case.

Following is a discussion of some techniques and strategies a plaintiff seeking to make out a mixed-dust claim might rely on. In conjunction with this is an explanation of what is likely the most reliable procedure to identify potential injury-causing substances, which is conducted using a scanning electron microscope. The author then presents examples of how courts grappling with mixed-dust claims, both in workers’ compensation and tort, have addressed the issue of causation.

The next portion of Part IV describes ways in which legislatures, through the creation of administrative and other alternative means of compensation, and courts, by relaxing or modifying the traditional methods of proving one’s case in a tort claim, have made it possible for certain persons to recover monetary relief for their injuries. An example of how legislatures have acted to facilitate recovery by those who suffer injuries in the workplace is the passage of “presumption” statutes, which serve to either conclusively or rebuttably establish that one or more of an injured worker’s employers were responsible for the injuries caused. As for some of the judicial doctrines aimed at helping certain plaintiffs make out a case for re-
covery who otherwise would have lost in court, these include the “substan-
tial factor” test and “burden-shifting” to defendants. This segment finishes
by analyzing how and whether existing laws and doctrines originally cre-
ated to deal with other areas of the law, such as “ordinary” pneumoconiosis
(as opposed to the mixed-dust kind) and asbestos cases, would impact
mixed-dust claims.

In the last section of Part IV, the author explores the feasibility and de-
sirability of adopting alternatives to litigation as a way of dealing with
mixed-dust claims. The first of such methods discussed is the use of set-
tlements, and to that end, the relative advantages and disadvantages of set-
tlements are discussed. Also addressed are no-fault compensation schemes,
either statutory or judicially created, that aim to provide injured persons
with monetary relief while eliminating the need for lengthy and difficult
litigation. Some examples of such schemes employed in the past are the
National Childhood Vaccine Program Injury Act and the agreement reached
in the Agent Orange litigation.

In Part V, the conclusion, the author begins by providing a brief sum-
mary of the major points from each section. He then posits that while in-
surance law and possible future legislation dealing with asbestos could re-
sult in a substantial number of would-be asbestos plaintiffs choosing to file
their claims under the rubric of mixed-dust, the exact degree of this occur-
rence will depend on several factors, including in what direction insurance
law goes, and to what extent the provisions of the FAIR Act or similar
legislation are passed, and how or whether courts and legislatures act to
ease some of the causation hurdles that mixed-dust claimants would face.

A. A Brief Medical Explanation of Mixed-Dust Claims

As its name implies, mixed-dust claims arise when a plaintiff alleges
that he has become ill from coming into contact, i.e., inhaling, two or more
types of particles of an airborne nature. In medical circles, this condition is
typically referred to as mixed-dust pneumoconiosis. One of the factors that

---

4 The primary purpose of this section is to provide the reader with some general medical back-
ground of mixed-dust claims. More specific information, particularly how these diseases can be diag-
nosed, are addressed in greater detail in connection with causation issues that mixed-dust plaintiffs are
likely to face in infra Part IV.

5 See DORLAND’S ILLUSTRATED MEDICAL DICTIONARY, Definition of Pneumoconiosis (W.B.
SzusSszcommsonzSszdorlandsxzSzdorlandsxzSzdmd_p_25zPzhtm (last visited Feb. 26, 2006) [hereinafter
Definition of Pneumoconiosis].

6 See Barbara Barron, Dealing With Alternative Exposures: Mixed Dust Pneumoconioses, 1
MEALEY’S LITIG. REP.: SILICA, May 2003, at 1, 1 [hereinafter Alternative Exposures]. Another name for
pneumoconiosis is “interstitial lung disease,” see Lawrence Martin, Pitfalls in Diagnosis of Occupa-
tional Lung Disease for Purposes of Compensation -- One Physician’s Perspective, 13 J.L. & HEALTH
49, 59 (1998-99) (using the terms interchangeably), which one source defines as “an inflammation in
make mixed-dust disease unique from other medical conditions (and why it is hard to prove) is the varied ways in which someone may develop the condition, particularly in the workplace. Among the afflicted have been shipyard workers (asbestos, silica, fiberglass, and miscellaneous metal-based fumes), crane operators (coal dust, silica, and asbestos), brick layers (silica, asbestos, and cement dusts), and steel mill operators (silica, asbestos, metal fumes, carbon dust, mica, graphite, and clay). But even though mixed-dust pneumoconiosis is, by definition, caused by the inhalation of two or more substances, the result of the disease (in terms of the impact on the individual’s health) in most instances would not necessarily be different from lung ailments caused by inhaling a single substance, as in either case, the afflicted person’s diagnosis would be the same—pneumoconiosis—with the main distinguishing factor between the two types of diseases being that mixed-dust pneumoconiosis involves more than one material. Thus, some background on “ordinary” pneumoconiosis is highly relevant to our discussion.

Pneumoconiosis is defined as a “diagnosable disease[] of the lung produced by the inhalation of dust (dust being understood to be particulate matter in the solid phase, excluding living organisms).” It is a chronic disease, and typically “affect[s] the lung parenchyma (the lung tissue itself or the essential parts of the lung that are concerned with its function);” in this regard, pneumoconiosis involves not only the reaction of the lungs due and around the tiny air sacs of the lung (alveoli) caused by an allergic reaction to inhaled organic dusts or, less commonly, chemicals.” The Merck Manual of Medical Information – Second Home Edition, Chapter 51: Allergic Diseases of the Lung (2004), http://www.merck.com/mrkshared/mmanual_home2/sec04/ch051/ch051b.jsp (last visited Feb. 26, 2006) [hereinafter Merck Manual]. Labeling all cases of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis as interstitial lung disease may be misleading, however, as interstitial lung disease can have several different causes. See Frank Chung & Elizabeth Dean, Pathophysiology and Cardiorespiratory Consequences of Interstitial Lung Disease — Review and Clinical Implications: A Special Communication, 69 PHYSICAL THERAPY 956, 956 (1989) (stating that “[the term ]interstitial lung disease comprises over 130 diseases”); see generally American Lung Association, Interstitial Lung Disease and Pulmonary Fibrosis, available at http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=35436 (last visited Feb. 26, 2006) [hereinafter Pulmonary Fibrosis] (providing background information on the disease, including various ways in which it can be caused).

For a general overview of the difficulties inherent in establishing causation, see infra Part IV.

See Mark Love & Scott Goldberg, Mixed-Dust Claims Could Be the Next Wave; Asbestos Exclusions May Not Work in New Context, 25 Nat’l. L.J., Sept. 8, 2003, at 17, 18-19; see Alternative Exposures, supra note 6, at 2-9 (collecting pneumoconiosis cases and organizing them by substances and places of occupational exposure).

See ATTORNEY’S TEXTBOOK OF MEDICINE § 14-205 (3d. ed. 2003) [hereinafter ATTORNEY’S TEXTBOOK] (stating that symptoms “are not specifically diagnostic of the particular disease”); See also Alternative Exposures, supra note 6, at 1 (differentiating mixed-dust pneumoconiosis from ordinary pneumoconiosis by the number of substances each consists of).

Alternative Exposures, supra note 6, at 1 (borrowing from PULMONARY MED. 638 (Clarence A. Guenter ed., J.B. Lippincott Co. 2d ed. 1982)).

See ATTORNEY’S TEXTBOOK, supra note 9.

Id.
to particle inhalation, but also the subsequent alteration of the lung structure and function.\textsuperscript{13} It should be noted that although the symptoms manifesting from this disease can approximate ones caused by other lung diseases, pneumoconiosis is a unique diagnosis and is to be distinguished from more commonly known diseases like asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema.\textsuperscript{14} Pneumoconiosis is most often contracted in occupational settings,\textsuperscript{15} since

\textsuperscript{13} See id.
\textsuperscript{15} See infra note 38; infra note 40 and accompanying text. One interesting instance of occupational exposure to toxic substances that has already resulted in a plethora of mixed-dust claims is the tragic events that occurred in Ground Zero on September 11, 2001, especially the collapsing of the World Trade Center Towers and some nearby buildings. See generally MICHEL BRUNEAU ET AL., OVERVIEW OF DAMAGE TO BUILDINGS NEAR GROUND ZERO (2002), http://mceer.buffalo.edu/publications/wtc/02-SP02Screen.pdf (last visited Feb. 26, 2006; on file with author) (surveying damage caused by the terrorist attacks, particularly to the area in and surrounding Ground Zero). Not only did almost 3,000 people die in the ensuing carnage, see Final Designs Unveiled for WTC Memorial (Nov. 19, 2003), at http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Northeast/11/19/attacks.memorial.ap/ (last visited Feb. 26, 2006), but the collapse of the buildings also released a great deal of pollution and toxic materials into the air, including particles of asbestos, cement, glass, jet fuel, and other products, see Ground Zero Workers’ Health Cloudy (Sept. 11, 2003), at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/09/10/earlyshow/contributors/emilysenay/main572586.shtml (last visited Feb. 26, 2006), and thousands of people, particularly rescue workers who persisted near Ground Zero for periods of weeks or even months after the terrorist attacks, have developed, or are at risk of developing, several ailments ranging from “World Trade Center cough” to acid reflux disease to emphysema to asthma and even cancer. See Health Problems Plague Ground Zero Workers (Mar. 2, 2003), at http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/health/2003-03-02-wtc-workers_x.htm (last visited Feb. 26, 2006).

In what was likely a prelude of things to come, in September of 2004 a class action lawsuit against the construction companies charged with overseeing the removal of debris at Ground Zero was filed in federal court in the Southern District of New York. The lawsuit purported to represent thousands of rescue and clean-up workers who lingered for days or weeks in Ground Zero in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. See generally Complaint, Divirgilio v. Silverstein Properties (No. 21-MC100), available at http://www.877twcher0.com/complaint.pdf (last visited Feb. 26, 2006; on file with author). The workers claim to be suffering from an array of health problems, including constant coughing, dizzy spells, shortness of breath, loss of hearing, development of tumors, acid reflux disease, and asthma. See id. at 14-17. In addition to seeking compensatory damages, the class also seeks to establish a medical monitoring program. See id. at 13.

Interestingly, the complaint is replete with references to what undoubtedly would fall within the scope of mixed dust: “The catastrophe created an immense cloud of caustic dust…”; “Residential … and other public buildings were coated with the toxic mix of chemical dust”; “Contaminated dust from the towers is trapped in air conditioning, heating and ventilation systems….”; “[S]afety precautions were needed to protect the rescue workers … and anyone else exposed to the caustic dust….”; “The high alkalinity of the WTC dust produced bronchial hyper-reactivity, persistent cough, and increased risk of
that is where high and frequent doses of pollutants are more likely to occur, but the disease may also be found with some regularity in residents of areas with excessive amounts of particulate matter in the air. It must be stressed that in order for the disease to develop, there must be exposure to high concentrations of airborne dusts, which can be either inorganic, i.e., non-living, such as iron, tin, barium, asbestos, coal, and, silica, or organic, which would typically involve some kind of mold. Furthermore, not everyone that inhales particles into their lungs, even if done with significant frequency or in a heavy amount, will develop pneumoconiosis, for the human lungs are able to rid the body of certain substances, depending on the size and nature of the particles.

As one can imagine, there are many recognized forms of pneumoconioses (plural of pneumoconiosis)—at least two-dozen in all, and expectedly, they are classified according to the materials that are responsible for their development. Thus, among the numerous types are silicosis (silica-based), asbestosis (asbestos-based), talcosis (talc-based), graphitosis (graphite-based), berylliosis (beryllium-based), tabacosis (tobacco-based), asthma.”; “240 New York City firefighters … received treatment of acute respiratory symptoms caused by inhalation of airborne smoke and dust....” Id. at 3-4. Recently, the United States Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that at least certain of plaintiffs’ claims could proceed. In re WTC Disaster Site, 414 F.3d 352 (2d Cir. 2005).

Similar lawsuits stemming from the World Trace Center disaster have been filed against other entities, including the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA. See, e.g., http://www.911ea.org/Current_Lawsuits.htm (last visited Feb. 26, 2006) (describing such a lawsuit).

The tragic World Trade Center situation also illustrates the potential causation problems mixed-dust plaintiffs might face, given that it would most likely be impossible to know exactly which substances might have caused which injuries, and from where the substances originated. See New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, NYCOSH Testimony at the EPA Ombudsman Investigative Hearing on the Environmental and Public Health Impact of the World Trade Center Attack, available at http://www.nycosh.org/WTCcatastrophe/EPAOmbudsHearingFeb23.html (last modified Jan. 19, 2006; last visited Feb. 26, 2006) (“The variability of the contents of the World Trade Center and the massive scale and intensity of destruction make it virtually impossible to anticipate, let alone sample, all possible resulting contaminants.”); see generally infra Part IV.A-C (addressing some of the causation burdens mixed-dust plaintiffs might face, including identifying and linking the alleged injury-causing substances to a defendant).

16 See Definition of Pneumoconiosis, supra note 5.
17 See ATTORNEY’S TEXTBOOK, supra note 9.
18 See Love & Goldberg, supra note 8, at 17.
19 See id. at 18:

Particles . . . [that are] big enough [tend] to be caught in the upper airways and eliminated out through the nose and mouth. [Very small particles . . . are small enough to be dealt with by the body’s immune response . . . . Particles between these sizes can accumulate in the lungs, however, . . . [sometimes] causing scarring. Many of the inorganic dusts, such as asbestos and silica, continue to cause scarring in the lungs long after they are inhaled.

Id.

20 See Alternative Exposures, supra note 6, at 2-7; infra note 22 and accompanying text (providing examples of substances that can cause pneumoconiosis).
21 See Definition of Pneumoconiosis, supra note 5 (stating that the various conditions “are often named for the implicated substance”).
and siderosis (iron-based). And it would be remiss to not mention the exotic variant of pneumoconiosis known as pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis (very fine silica dust).

B. Similarities Between Pneumoconiosis and Asbestos-Related Lung Diseases

Little or no introduction to health problems wrought by asbestos is needed, and indeed, an in-depth or abstract explanation of asbestos-related legal or medical problems is beyond the scope of this Comment. For our purposes, it suffices to say that asbestos is responsible for one of the worst medical crises the United States has seen, and that the situation has proven to be a significant impetus for insurers to exclude coverage for asbestos and similar pollutants, as well as for Congress to propose legislation seeking to control the rampant litigation related to asbestos claims. Primarily because of this, an examination of the similarities in medical terms between asbestos-related diseases and pneumoconiosis is warranted.

Rather than comparing asbestos ailments in general to pneumoconiosis, it would be more fruitful to restrict the discussion of such diseases to that of asbestos’ manifestation of pneumoconiosis, aptly named asbestosis. Simply put, asbestosis is the name given to pneumoconiosis caused by the inhalation of asbestos. The disease is characterized by a scarring of the lungs caused by the deposit of asbestos fibers, and typical symptoms displayed by those suffering from asbestosis include heart failure, progressive...
31 See Varkey, supra note 30.
32 See id.
33 See generally Pulmonary Fibrosis, supra note 6 (providing symptoms on interstitial lung disease). As noted earlier in note 6, pneumoconiosis is sometimes referred to as interstitial lung disease.
34 E.g., Kovaliski v. Collins Co., 128 A. 288, 288 (Conn. 1925) (Workers’ compensation case where plaintiff contracted pneumoconiosis due to “grinding,” described by the court as “the process of removing on a revolving stone the rough surfaces and edges of axes and other tools there manufactured”).
37 E.g., supra note 34. Some plaintiffs nonetheless elect to bring the claim under a tort theory, such as wrongful death. See, e.g., Triff v. National Bronze & Aluminum Foundry Co., 20 N.E.2d 232, 233 (Ohio 1939) (administratrix of decedent who died of silicosis sued decedent’s former employer,
ing, as occupational lung disease is the number-one work-related illness in the United States. 38 It is also not surprising to learn that a fair number of asbestos cases (which, as discussed earlier, share definite similarities with pneumoconiosis cases as a whole, 39) are also brought under workers’ compensation, 40 rather than in the torts context. One likely reason for this is that under the workers’ compensation laws of most states, plaintiffs are generally foreclosed from pursuing claims against their employers through the courts, but rather must rely on the applicable state’s workers’ compensation scheme; 41 this is commonly referred to as the “exclusive remedy” rule, 42 and a similar limitation applies to federal employees. 43


39 See generally supra Part I.B.


Nonetheless, there are drawbacks to proceeding with a claim under workers’ compensation as opposed to filing a lawsuit, chief among those being that the maximum amount recoverable under workers’ compensation would likely be much lower than the damages that might be awarded in a lawsuit. See Sidney A. Shapiro, Economic Analysis of State Employment Law Issues Symposium: The Necessity of OSHA, 8 KAN. J.L. & PUB. POL’y 22, 28 (1999) (“All states have caps on damages and other limitations that significantly restrict [the amount awarded under] workers’ compensation . . . .”). And because employers are often immune from lawsuits stemming from work-related injuries, see infra notes 41-43 and accompanying text, persons who choose to sue for their injuries stemming from asbestos exposure might have no choice but to go after the manufacturer(s) of the asbestos product(s) that caused the plaintiff’s injuries, and this would not be desirable because many of these companies simply cannot afford to pay any judgments entered against them, see infra note 306 and accompanying text.

41 See, e.g., Travelers Indem. Co. v. Reker, 100 S.W.3d 756 (Ky. 2003) (after analyzing Kentucky’s Workers’ Compensation Scheme, found in sections 342.011-990 of the Kentucky Revised Statutes (2002), the court held that the plaintiff’s exclusive remedy for securing benefits for injuries sustained on the job lay within the state’s workers’ compensation scheme).

42 See, e.g., John D. Copeland, The New Arkansas Workers’ Compensation Act: Did the Pendulum Swing Too Far?, 47 ARK. L. REV. 1, 41 (1994) (“Under most workers’ compensation schemes[,] employers are granted immunity from most employee tort claims because workers’ compensation is the
The role of the courts in a workers’ compensation case involving a mixed-dust claim may be gauged by examining a typical opinion such as Clinchfield Coal Company v. Reed. In Clinchfield, the Virginia Court of Appeals was faced with an appeal from the defendant, Clinchfield Coal Company, challenging an award of medical benefits by the Virginia Workers’ Compensation Commission to the claimant, Farrell D. Reed, for the coal workers’ pneumoconiosis he allegedly had developed from his job.

In affirming the award of benefits, the court first noted that a very deferential standard applied in that context. The court then briefly defined coal workers’ pneumoconiosis as “a disease of the lung that results from the accumulation of coal dust in the lungs” and proceeded to examine the evidence presented to the Commission. After noting that the evidence in the record sufficiently supported the Commission’s finding that the plaintiff had contracted the illness through his employment, the court turned to the decisive question before it, namely whether the plaintiff’s disease was one for which compensation could be had under Virginia’s workers’ compensation scheme. After analyzing the relevant statutory provision, the court recognized that the disease the plaintiff was suffering from, coal workers’ pneu-
moconiosis, was indeed a compensable injury for the purposes of workers’ compensation, and affirmed the judgment.

The Clinchfield case is illustrative of the type of analysis courts will undertake in reviewing workers’ compensation claims for injuries stemming from pneumoconiosis. First, they are highly deferential to the conclusions reached by the tribunals below, whether it be a trial court or administrative body. Second, the courts will focus on interpreting and applying statutory schemes to the case before it, rather than tort or other legal principles. Finally, they will tend to engage in the difficult analysis of medical evidence and related questions only to the extent that is necessary to review the lower body’s decision.

Sometime after cases related to “simple” pneumoconiosis appeared, cases involving claims of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis began appearing in various courts, with the first of these tracing back to New York courts in 1963. They continue to appear with some frequency, and as with cases alleging ordinary pneumoconiosis, a good number - in fact, most - of reported opinions involving claims of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis are in the form of appeals from workers’ compensation board decisions.

53 See Clinchfield, 577 S.E.2d at 541. In reaching this conclusion, the court relied in part on the Commission’s statement that “[a]sbestosis is but one of the several occupationally-induced pneumoconioses for which workers’ compensation benefits, including medical benefits, are available.” Id.

54 Id. at 543.

55 See supra note 47 and accompanying text.


58 See, e.g., supra notes 34-35 (examples of such cases).

59 Groff, 239 N.Y.S.2d 738. Groff involved an appeal by an employer of a decision by New York’s workers’ compensation board that awarded benefits to a worker for disabilities he developed as a result of working as a miner. Id. at 739. The plaintiff had been diagnosed with, among other things, mixed-dust pneumoconiosis after coming into contact with gypsum and silica. Id. at 739-40. The Groff case was mentioned in passing earlier in supra note 3 and the text accompanying it.

60 E.g., Bailey v. N. Am. Refractories Co., 95 S.W.3d 868 (Ky. Ct. App. 2001). Bailey is somewhat unusual in that it is not a workers’ compensation case; rather, certain employees of a factory that made asbestos-containing products sued the manufacturer, alleging that the company’s negligence was responsible for the various diseases they had contracted, among them being mixed-dust pneumoconiosis (of which asbestos was one factor). Id. at 870. For an examination of how the Bailey court addressed the plaintiff’s claims, which by so doing allows one to glean some of the differences between a claim filed in tort and one filed in workers’ compensation, see infra Part IV.D.1.

61 See supra note 37 and accompanying text.

62 E.g., supra note 59 (providing an example of such a case). A search on Westlaw done on February 26, 2006, for both federal and state cases containing the words “mix! dust pneum!” (! is a wildcard character in Westlaw, meaning, for example, that any words beginning with “mix” would be found) netted thirty-three cases, and most of those involved workers’ compensation claims (including many from Pennsylvania, which is not surprising given the amount of mining that is done there.) A similar but broader search done the same day using the words “mix!-dust” was a bit more fruitful, yield-
Mixed-dust pneumoconiosis cases share another similarity with other types of pneumoconiosis cases; although mixed-dust pneumoconiosis cases are obviously not identical to those in which plaintiffs allege “ordinary” pneumoconiosis, courts will, at least when dealing with workers’ compensation cases, take a comparable approach in deciding both. Illustrative of this is *Alston v. Chrysler Corporation*, an appeal from a decision by Michigan’s Worker’s Compensation Appellate Commission (WCAC) in which the court chose to adopt the magistrate’s findings that the plaintiff was afflicted with mixed-dust pneumoconiosis and asbestos, and then went on to find Chrysler Corporation responsible for paying the worker medical benefits. As was the case in *Clinchfield*, the court in *Alston* began its opinion by noting the extremely deferential standard that applies in appeals from workers’ compensation decisions involving mixed-dust pneumoconiosis.

The court then proceeded to the merits of the claim by analyzing the magistrate’s findings that the “plaintiff was disabled by a work-related dust disease resulting from his exposure to asbestos.” [Oddly enough, “[t]he magistrate did not expressly state the type of dust disease from which the plaintiff suffered.”] As is typical in these cases, the magistrate reached
her conclusion by relying on the submitted testimony of doctors. In particular, there was evidence presented from two doctors that indicated the plaintiff suffered from, inter alia, mixed-dust pneumoconiosis that was likely caused by a combination of the plaintiff being exposed to asbestos in the workplace and his habit of smoking. On appeal, the court summarily adopted the magistrate’s findings on this issue, and although the correctness of the magistrate’s medical findings was not the central issue in the case, Alston is nonetheless indicative of the extreme deference that courts give to lower tribunals’ decisions in workers’ compensation cases. As was alluded to earlier, the court ultimately affirmed the WCAC’s ruling that Chrysler was responsible for the plaintiff’s benefits.

B. Legislation Concerning Pneumoconiosis

1. State Laws

As of present, many states have enacted laws dealing with pneumoconiosis, usually in the context of workers’ compensation. These statutes range from providing definitions of pneumoconiosis to listing examples of compensable pneumoconiosis to creating presumptions in favor of pneumoconiosis victims. In terms of liability in occupational settings, although

Such a requirement is common among workers’ compensation statutes, probably because, as the Supreme Court recognized in Youngberg v. Romeo, 457 U.S. 307 (1982), “there certainly is no reason to think judges or juries are better qualified than appropriate professionals in making [medical] decisions.” Id. at 322-23.

71 See Alston, 622 N.W.2d at 796-97.
72 Id.
73 See supra note 65.
74 See supra notes 47, 57, 67 and accompanying text.
75 See supra note 65 and accompanying text.
76 See, e.g., ALA CODE § 25-5-110 (2003); D.C. CODE ANN. § 32-1510 (2003); 820 ILL COMP STAT 310/1 (2003); IOWA CODE § 85A.12 (2003); KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 342.316 (BANKS-BALDWIN 2002); MICH. COMP. LAWS § 418.531 (2003); MONT. CODE ANN. § 39-72-303 (2003); N.Y. WORKERS’ COMP. LAW § 44-A (CONSOL. 2003); N.D. CENT. CODE § 65-05-01.1 (2003); OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 4123.68; 77 PA. CONST. STAT. § 411.1 (2003); R.I. GEN. LAWS § 28-34-2 (2003); TENN. CODE ANN. § 50-6-303 (2003); VA. CODE ANN. § 65.2-513 (MICHEE 2003); W. VA. CODE § 23-4-14 (2003). Additionally, in mid-2004 the legislature of Ohio passed a comprehensive bill regulating mixed-dust claims in several regards, including defining what a mixed-dust claim is, establishing what a claimant must prove in order to prevail, and detailing who may be held liable for such claims. See generally OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 2307.84-902.
77 See, e.g., ALA CODE § 25-5-110:

Occupational pneumoconiosis [is a] disease of the lungs caused by inhalation of minute particles of dust over a period of time, which dust is due to causes and conditions arising out of and in the course of the employment, without regard to whether the causes or conditions are inherent in the employment or can be eliminated or reduced by due care on the part of the employer.

78 See, e.g., D.C. CODE ANN. § 32-1510 (listing silicosis and asbestosis as examples of occupational diseases).
79 See, e.g., N.Y. WORKERS’ COMP. LAW § 44-a (“The employer in whose employment an employee was last exposed to an injurious dust hazard shall be liable for the payments required by this
there are slight variations, typically the employer who will be held liable for compensating those who have contracted pneumoconiosis is the one in whose employ the afflicted were last exposed to the agent(s) causing pneumoconiosis.

The various state statutes dealing with workers’ compensation for pneumoconiosis typically provide for procedures on how a worker may initiate a claim. An example of such a statute is section 342.316 of the Kentucky Statutes, which outlines in detail the steps that a claimant seeking benefits for occupational diseases must follow. First, he must file a “claim for resolution” that lists, among other things, the worker’s complete work history, replete with the names and addresses of past employers and the dates of employment. The employee must also provide at least one written medical report supporting his claim, prepared by a licensed physician, “which shall be made on the basis of clinical or X-ray examination performed in accordance with accepted medical standards and shall contain full and complete statements of all examinations performed and the results thereof.” In addition to the report, the claim must be accompanied by a chest X-ray examination “and appropriate pulmonary function tests” that “comply with accepted medical standards.” The statute then minutely details the medical requirements and procedures that the examining physician must abide by.
Assuming that the employee complies with these filing requirements, the claim will then proceed to the next phase; the commissioner in charge of workers’ compensation will notify the employer “and all other interested parties” by furnishing them with a copy of the application and any other materials submitted by the claimant. The claim will then be assigned to an administrative law judge, and within thirty days of receiving notice of the claim, the employer must notify the commissioner and “all parties of record” of its acceptance or denial of the claim.

If the employer denies the claim, within forty-five days of the claim being assigned to a judge, the employer must arrange for the employee to be examined by a physician of the employer’s choosing. This examination must conform to the same requirements as that of the examination report filed by the claimant, and the results of the examination must be provided to the commissioner and “all other parties.” The commissioner will then determine if the parties’ filings are in consensus as specified by the statute, and if he does so conclude, his findings will constitute fairly conclusive evidence and will be forwarded to the parties and the judge handling the case. If the commissioner deems that the parties’ filings are contradictory to one another, the judge will have to weigh the evidence and make a determination on the merits of the claim. Either way, unless the parties reach a settlement beforehand, the judge’s ruling is due no later than sixty days from the time of the initial hearing.

2. Federal Laws

As with state statutes, one can find federal codes and regulations dealing with pneumoconiosis, among the most prominent of which is the Black Lung Benefits Act. Congress deemed it necessary to pass this legislation...
because it found that “there [we]re a significant number of coal miners . . . who are totally disabled due to pneumoconiosis arising out of employment in . . . coal mines . . . and that few States provide benefits for [these] coal miners or their surviving dependents.”\textsuperscript{98} As is suggested by its name, the focus of the Act is fairly narrow, as it applies only to pneumoconiosis claims that derive from working in coal mines.\textsuperscript{99} Furthermore, the Act was, and still is, intended to complement, rather than replace, states’ workers’ compensation schemes for pneumoconiosis claims, for only when a claimant is not eligible for state benefits\textsuperscript{100} or when the state benefits are inadequate\textsuperscript{101} does the Act apply. And the Act, as with many state compensation schemes,\textsuperscript{102} creates statutory presumptions that favor claimants.\textsuperscript{103}

For another example of federal law dealing with pneumoconiosis, the reader may wish to study \textit{American Textile Manufacturers Institute v. Donovan}, 452 U.S. 490 (1981), where the Supreme Court had the opportunity to examine the validity of (and ultimately uphold) Title 29, Section 1910.1043 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2004), which represented the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s highest threshold of tolerable occupational exposure to “cotton dust,” a substance that can lead to a variation of pneumoconiosis known as byssinosis. More information on this condition can be found in \textit{Donovan}, 452 U.S. at 495-505.

\textsuperscript{98} 30 U.S.C. § 901(a).

\textsuperscript{99} 30 U.S.C. § 902(b) (“The term ‘pneumoconiosis’ [in this Act] means a chronic dust disease of the lung and its sequelae, including respiratory and pulmonary impairments, arising out of coal mine employment.”).

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{See} supra note 79 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{See} supra note 79 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{See} supra note 79 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{E.g.}, 30 U.S.C. § 921(c)(1) (stating that “[i]f a miner who is suffering or suffered from pneumoconiosis was employed for ten years or more in one or more coal mines there shall be a rebuttable presumption that his pneumoconiosis arose out of such employment”); 30 U.S.C. § 921(c)(2) (providing that “[i]f a deceased miner was employed for ten years or more in one or more coal mines and died from a respirable disease there shall be rebuttable presumption that his death was due to pneumoconiosis”). Other presumptions applicable to the Black Lung Act can be found in the Federal Code. \textit{See, e.g.}, 20 C.F.R. § 718.304 (2003) (establishing irrebuttable presumption that a miner’s death was due to pneumoconiosis or that a miner was totally disabled due to pneumoconiosis at the time of death if certain evidence is presented or under certain situations); 20 C.F.R. § 718.305 (2003) (creating rebuttable presumption that a miner is or was totally disabled due to pneumoconiosis or that his death was caused by pneumoconiosis if he was a coal miner for fifteen years or more and certain evidence, such as an X-ray, establishes a pulmonary impairment); 20 C.F.R. § 718.306 (2003) (providing rebuttable presumption that the survivors of a miner who was employed for 25 years or more and died prior to March 1, 1978,
Mainly through provisions of the Federal Code, the Black Lungs Act specifies, as do many state statutes, the procedures that claimants seeking benefits must fulfill. The Act’s procedures have already been analyzed by other commentators, and so only a cursory examination is necessary here. The basic requirements that a claimant must comply with in order to receive benefits under the Act, particularly in terms of what evidence of his injuries he must present, are outlined in title 20, sections 718.201-206 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Not surprisingly, a threshold matter for the eligibility of benefits is a determination that the claimant suffers from pneumoconiosis, and this may be achieved primarily through four means: 1) providing a chest X-ray that shows evidence of pneumoconiosis, 2) submitting an autopsy or biopsy report, 3) relying on the various presumptions afforded by Congress, and 4) procuring a finding by a physician “exercising sound medical judgment” that the miner suffers or has suffered from pneumoconiosis.

C. Insurance Policies Dealing with Pneumoconiosis

Analyzing the potential impact that a possible surge in mixed-dust claims might have requires a look at the current state of insurance policies and how they might serve to limit, or at least complicate, such a trend.

are entitled to the payment of benefits); see generally Olson, supra note 97 (discussing the role that presumptions have played in the Black Lung Benefits Act).

104 See generally supra Part II.B.1 (describing the procedures a person must follow to initiate a workers’ compensation pneumoconiosis claim in Kentucky).

105 The bulk of these are located in Title 20, Sections 718.101-307 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2003).


108 20 C.F.R. § 718.202. Linking the alleged cause of the plaintiff’s injury to a defendant is, unsurprisingly, an essential element of almost any type of claim, whether it be in the nature of workers’ compensation or tort. See infra notes 372-73 and accompanying text.

109 20 C.F.R. § 718.202(a)(1). The X-ray must be in conformity with the requirements listed in Title 20, Section 718.102 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

110 20 C.F.R. § 718.202(2). The autopsy or biopsy must be conducted under the procedures specified in Title 20, Section 106 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

111 20 C.F.R. § 718.202(3). The presumptions specifically referenced are Title 20, Sections 718.304-06 of the Code of Federal Regulations, and these were discussed in supra note 103.

112 20 C.F.R. § 718.202(4). The physician’s finding must “be based on objective medical evidence such as blood-gas studies, electrocardiograms, pulmonary function studies, physical performance tests, physical examination, and medical and work histories,” and furthermore, must “be supported by a reasoned medical opinion.” Id.

113 There are, of course, many different types of insurance policies, ranging from automobile to property to life insurance. See generally Douglas R. Richmond, Issues and Problems in "Other Insurance," Multiple Insurance, and Self-Insurance, 22 Pepp. L. Rev. 1373 (1995) (discussing various types of insurance policies and how they differ in terms of coverage and interpretation). However, given that the majority of mixed-dust claims arise out of work-related occurrences, which in turn means that many,
That is because today, most companies are protected by some form of insurance. Of course, this fact does not end, but rather begins, the question of if and to what extent companies will be liable for mixed-dust claims, for that question will naturally depend on the language of the policy. Thus, an examination of the most common types of insurance applicable in this context, as well as how courts have addressed these policies, is warranted.

1. The Commercial General Liability Policy (CGL)

The most widely used type of insurance policy by businesses is the CGL, which are form policies developed by the Insurance Service Office (ISO). These policies, as their name suggests, are broad and intended to “provide[ ] insurance for businesses against responsibility for accidents,” particularly for claims of bodily injury and property damage. Typically, if not most, of the defendants will be companies, see supra note 40, the focus of this section will be on the type of insurance policies that businesses typically carry, namely the so-called comprehensive or commercial general liability policy (CGL), see infra note 116 and accompanying text. The titles of the policies are misleading, for while they “suggest[ ] the expectation of maximum coverage,” Timothy Stanton, Now You See It, Now You Don't: Defective Liability Insurance, 25 LOY. U. CHI. L.J. 109, 111 n.16 (1993), the scope of CGL policies is such that in actuality they only guard businesses against certain types of risks, see id. at 111 n.15-16.

See George W. Kuney, Misinterpreting Bankruptcy Code Section 363(f) and Undermining the Chapter 11 Process, 76 AM. BANKR. L.J. 235, 286 n.195 (2002) (recognizing that “most companies carry substantial amounts of liability insurance”).

See, e.g., Fireman’s Fund Ins. Co. v. Fibreboard Corp., 227 Cal. Rptr. 203, 205 (Cal. Ct. App. 1986) (“The starting point [of determining an insurer’s liability], of course, is the plain meaning of the policy language.”).


The ISO is a private institution that exists primarily to write standard policy forms for the insurance industry. See Small, supra note 116, at 712. Aside from writing the actual policies, the ISO files the policies with the various states’ insurance regulators, see Hartford Fire Ins. Co. v. Cal., 509 U.S. 764, 772 (1993), which is required by the law of many states, see Melody A. Hamel, Comment, The 1970 Pollution Exclusion in Comprehensive General Liability Policies: Reasons for Interpretations in Favor of Coverage in 1996 and Beyond, 34 DUQ. L. REV. 1083, 1103 (1996) (stating that most states require proposals for new policy language to be filed with and approved by the state insurance commissioner prior to inclusion of that language in policies). In addition, and somewhat expectedly, the ISO also supplies insurance companies with useful statistical information pertaining to the industry: for example, it collects and interprets data on the premiums charged, claims filed and paid, and defense costs expended with respect to each form. See Hartford, 509 U.S. at 772. More information about the ISO may be had at its website, http://www.iso.com (last visited Feb. 17, 2006).


See Small, supra note 116; Westchester Fire Ins. Co. v. Pittsburg, 768 F. Supp. 1463, 1468 n.5 (D. Kan. 1991) (both recognizing that CGL policies are meant to insure a business against personal
the policies will first identify the risks that are covered, and then specify possible exclusions from those general areas of risk. For the purpose of this Comment, the most noteworthy of these exclusions is the “pollution exclusion” clause, which, significantly, may be found in virtually all CGLs in existence today. Somewhat obviously, the ISO periodically updates these forms to correspond with changing times and needs; in the context applicable here, namely what type of liability related to mixed-dust incidents is and is not covered by CGL insurance policies, the most influential version has been, and continues to be, the one authored by the ISO in 1986. Because of this, the impact that the 1986 CGL policy has had, and may have, on mixed-dust claims may be better appreciated by briefly examining the evolution over time that these “pollution exclusion” clauses have undergone.

a) Reasons for the Prevalence of Pollution Exclusion Clauses and How They Evolved Over Time. It is agreed by most that the primary reason for today’s proliferation of pollution exclusion clauses was the “enormous expense and exposure resulting from the ‘explosion’ of environmental liti-

---

120 See Prince, supra note 118, at 592 n.195.
124 For the purposes of this Comment, a brief look at the history and purpose of the CGLs’ pollution exclusion clause will suffice. However, for those seeking a more comprehensive study of the myriad changes that have occurred to pollution exclusion clauses since their origin, and the reasons for those changes, many fine sources exist. See Richardson v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co., 826 A.2d 310, 314-19 (D.C. Cir. 2003), vacated on other grounds by 832 A.2d 752 (2003); Leiter, supra note 123, at 280-84; Jonathan C. Averback, Comment, Comparing the Old and the New Pollution Exclusion Clauses in General Liability Insurance Policies: New Language—Same Results?, 14 B.C. Envtl. Aff. L. Rev. 601, 604-10 (1987) (all providing background and historical information on the evolution of the “pollution exclusion” clause in insurance policies, particularly those promulgated by the ISO).
2006] Mixed Dust Claims—The Next Asbestos 129

gation.” Even so, the clauses trace back to well over half a century, with the first significant change to them occurring in 1966. Prior to then, CGL policies provided coverage for bodily injury or property damage caused by "accidents." To complicate things, however, what constituted an accident was not defined in the policies, which led to much confusion and, ultimately, litigation. Tired of this, in 1966 the ISO replaced the “accident” trigger with that of the “occurrence” trigger, with “occurrence” being defined as “an accident, including injurious exposure to conditions, which results, during the policy period, in bodily injury and property damage that was neither expected nor intended from the standpoint of the insured.” Much to the dismay of the ISO, insurance companies, and insureds, the

125 Weaver v. Royal Ins. Co. of Am., 674 A.2d 975, 977 (N.H. 1996) (quoting Vantage Dev. Corp. v. American Environment Technologies Corp., 598 A.2d 948, 953 (N.J. Super. Ct. Law Div. 1991)). It might seem elementary that insurance companies would try to limit their responsibility to defend or indemnify claims filed against their insureds, but the extent of the companies’ efforts in the pollution exclusion context is such that one court had this to say of one insurance carrier who contended that its policy did not cover asbestos-related risks: “In plain language, [the insurance carrier here] has adopted the unholy mantra, ‘we collect premiums; we do not pay claims.’” Owens-Illinois v. United Ins. Co., 625 A.2d 1, 17 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1993). And perhaps it is more than just a mere coincidence that it was in 1986, the same year that the “absolute” pollution exclusion clause was created and that the “insurance crisis” began, see infra notes 138-139 and accompanying text, that these general insurance policies became known as “commercial,” rather than “comprehensive,” general liability policies (which, incidentally, is how they are still referred to as today). See Thomas K. Bick & Lisa G. Youngblood, The Pollution Exclusion Saga Continues: Does it Apply to Indoor Releases?, 5 S.C. ENVTL. L.J. 119, 124 (1997) (noting that 1986 “marked a change in the name of the liability policy from a comprehensive general liability policy to a commercial general liability policy”); Kenneth S. Abraham, The Rise and Fall of Commercial Liability Insurance, 87 Va. L. Rev. 85, 89 (2001) (deducing that the 1986 name change of CGL policies from comprehensive to commercial “can only be assumed [to have been] an effort to eliminate the disadvantage that insurers faced in litigation over whether there was coverage under a ‘comprehensive’ policy”).


128 See id. at 944 (“The biggest interpretation issue to date has been over what the terms ‘sudden’ and ‘accidental’ [in CGL policies] mean.”). The courts certainly did their part in ensuring uncertainty as to the meaning of “accident,” for the word took vastly different connotations depending on which court was deciding the issue. See E. Joshua Rosenkranz, Note, The Pollution Exclusion Clause Through the Looking Glass, 74 Geo. L.J. 1237, 1243 (1986) (“The courts ignored the insurers’ intentions by formulating a variety of definitions for the word ‘accident.’”). For example, some courts took the clause at face value and precluded coverage for losses that were foreseeable because, they reasoned, something that is foreseeable could not have happened “accidentally,” i.e., suddenly. See id. Other courts took an opposite approach and concluded that just because something was foreseeable did not mean it could not be “accidental,” and in support of their stance, would cite to negligent acts as an example; these were “accidental” in the sense that they were not done with intent, but could still be deemed foreseeable. See id.

1966 change did not entirely eliminate the confusion over under which circumstances the pollution exclusion clause applied.\textsuperscript{130}

At around the same time of the 1966 revision, Congress passed substantial amendments to the Clean Air Act,\textsuperscript{131} which had the effect, inter alia, of imposing greater economic burdens on insurance underwriters, particularly those providing standard-form CGL policies.\textsuperscript{132} These burdens were increased yet further by contemporaneous and well-publicized environmental disasters, such as Times Beach and Love Canal.\textsuperscript{133} Mainly because of these events, in 1970 the ISO promulgated the first “true” pollution exclusion clause,\textsuperscript{134} which, in pertinent part, provided:

[This policy shall not apply to bodily injury or property damage] arising out of the discharge, dispersal, release or escape of smoke, vapors, soot, fumes, acids, alkalis, toxic chemicals, liquids or gases, waste materials or other irritants, contaminants or pollutants into or upon land, the atmosphere or any watercourse or body of water; but this exclusion does not apply if such discharge, dispersal, release or escape is sudden and accidental.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} See Koloms, 687 N.E.2d at 80 (“Despite [the 1966] changes, courts continued to construe the policy to cover damages resulting from long-term, gradual exposure to environmental pollution.”); see Sharon M. Murphy, Note, The “Sudden and Accidental” Exception to the Pollution Exclusion Clause in Comprehensive General Liability Insurance Policies: The Gordian Knot of Environmental Liability, 45 VAND. L. REV. 161, 165-67 (1992) (describing the reasons for the 1966 revision, and how the change did not have the intended effect the insurance industry had hoped for).


\textsuperscript{132} See Pittsburg, 768 F. Supp. at 1469 n.8 (recognizing that “sweeping legislation” passed by Congress, including the Clean Air Act, led to an increase in the adoption of pollution exclusion clauses by insurers).

\textsuperscript{133} See Aetna Life, 871 F. Supp. at 941 (noting that the Times Beach and Love Canal incidents served as an impetus for the adoption of pollution exclusion clauses). In Love Canal, which is located near Niagara Falls, New York, a public school and residential subdivisions were unwittingly built in the 1950s on top of reclaimed land that had previously been used by Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation as a dumpsite for chemical wastes. See Jill E. Evans, Challenging the Racism in Environmental Racism: Redefining the Concept of Intent, 40 ARIZ. L. REV. 1219, 1237 n.86 (1998). Public authorities later discovered that the town’s water supply had been contaminated by the chemicals, resulting in the ultimate evacuation of hundreds of families and an almost complete devaluation of the area’s property value. See id.

A similarly disastrous situation occurred in Times Beach, Missouri, where in 1971, a waste oil dealer sprayed contaminated oil on Times Beach’s dirt roads in an extremely misguided attempt to keep the dust down. See id. at 1237 n.87. Times Beach residents were unaware of the danger for years, even though virtually all households in the area started experiencing somewhat rare health problems. See id. In 1982, the government, aware of the potentially deadly consequences, recommended a property buyout of the area, and since then, all of Times Beach’s residents, numbering over 2000 in all, have moved out. See id.

\textsuperscript{134} See Koloms, 687 N.E.2d at 81 (explaining that “the insurance industry drafting organizations began in 1970 the process of drafting and securing regulatory approval for the standard pollution exclusion clause,” and that “[t]he result of these efforts was the addition of an [early pollution exclusion clause] to the standard-form CGL policy in 1970”).

\textsuperscript{135} Devine, supra note 121, at 959 n.74 (emphasis added).
As will be explained shortly, the ISO’s attempt to reduce confusion over the pollution exclusion clause’s applicability to particular factual situations by adding the phrase “sudden and accidental” was not as successful as the organization would have hoped.

b) Interpretative Issues Associated With Pollution Exclusion Clauses. Somewhat predictably, the next intensely debated issue over the next decade or so pertaining to pollution exclusion clauses was the meaning of “sudden and accidental,” leading one commentator to describe this issue as one of “the most hotly litigated insurance coverage questions of the late 1980’s.” Partly because of this, in 1986 (the exact year that the “insurance crisis” peaked) the ISO felt compelled to yet again change its pollution exclusion clause, this time to a version that was to be dubbed the “absolute” pollution exclusion clause:

It is agreed that this policy does not apply to personal injury or property damage arising out of the contamination of the environment by pollutants introduced at any time into or upon land, the atmosphere or any watercourse or body of water or aquifer. This exclusion applies whether or not the contamination is introduced into the environment intentionally or accidentally or gradually or suddenly and whether or not the insured or any other person or organization is responsible for the contamination.

---

136 See Koloms, 687 N.E.2d at 80 (“During the next 13 years, various courts labored over the exact meaning of the words ‘sudden and accidental.’”).

137 JEFFREY W. STEMPEL, INTERPRETATION OF INSURANCE CONTRACTS: LAW AND STRATEGY FOR INSURERS AND POLICYHOLDERS 825 (1994). Much of the litigation focused on whether the word “sudden” should be given a strictly temporal meaning, i.e., whether in order for the exception to apply, the discharge of pollution had to have been “abrupt.” See Koloms, 687 N.E.2d at 80-81.


139 See Koloms, 687 N.E.2d at 81 (“[Around 1985,] insurance companies responded [to the confusion over ‘sudden and accidental’] by drafting a new version of the [pollution] exclusion [clause], which . . . is now commonly known as the ‘absolute pollution exclusion.’”).

140 Amy Timmer, Are They Lying Now or Were They Lying Then? The Insurance Industry’s Ambiguous Pollution Exclusion: Why the Insurer, and Not the Innocent Insured, Should Pay for Pollution Caused by Prior Landowners, 46 BAYLOR L. REV. 355, 375 n.72 (1994). As noted earlier, these and other forms of insurance are updated every so often, see supra note 122 and accompanying text, so naturally, variations of the “absolute” exclusion language exist. For example, another fairly common version provides that “[t]his insurance does not apply to . . . [b]odily [i]njury or [p]roperty [d]amage arising out of the actual, alleged, or threatened discharge, dispersal, release or escape of pollutants at or from premises you own, rent or occupy.” Bick, supra note 125, at 124. However, the original “abso-
While one might think that the 1986 pollution exclusion clause would have provided a “rock solid” defense for insurers, one feature of the clause, that being its definition of the term “pollutant,” served to allow insurers’ liability and confusion over the clause to live on. Today’s standard definition characterizes “pollutant” as “any solid, liquid, gaseous or thermal irritant or contaminant, including smoke, vapor, soot, fumes, acids, alkalis, chemicals, and waste.” Furthermore, some policies include more specific pollution exclusion clauses that focus on a type or class of pollutants, in particular asbestos. For instance, the court in *Highlands Insurance Company v. Celotex Corporation* was charged with determining whether asbestos exclusion policies applied only to asbestosis, or to all asbestos-related diseases. One of the policies at issue provided that “[t]his policy shall not apply to any liability arising out of ASBESTOSIS and related diseases arising out of asbestos products.” The court ultimately concluded that this policy was meant to exclude all asbestos-related diseases, partly by relying on the doctrine of collateral estoppel.

---


142 Id.

143 *See*, e.g., Walter G. Wright, Jr. & Stephanie M. Irby, *The Transactional Challenges Posed by Mold: Risk Management and Allocation Issues*, 56 Ark. L. REV. 295, 354 n.366 (2003) (stating that “[m]any policies exclude coverage for indoor contaminants such as asbestos, lead-based paint, and mold”); Redmond v. State Farm Ins. Co., 728 A.2d 1202, 1204 (D.C. 1999) (noting that “State Farm[,] a prominent insurance company[,] ha[s] excluded lead paint coverage since August 24, 1987”). Further support lies in the fact that it has traditionally been difficult, if not impossible, to obtain insurance for certain substances such as asbestos. *See* Stonewall Ins. Co. v. Asbestos Claims Mgmt. Corp., 73 F.3d 1178, 1202 (2d Cir. 1995) (noting that “no coverage was available for asbestos claims after 1985”); Nicholas J. Guiliano, Comment, *The Sudden and Accidental Exception to the Pollution Exclusion Solution?*, 13 TEMP. ENVTL. L. & TECH. J. 261, 280 (1994) (“[T]oday[,] virtually no one can obtain pollution insurance at any price.”).

Interestingly, some courts have actually suggested that insurance companies should (or at least could) be a bit more detailed and careful in the drafting of their pollution exclusion clauses in order to increase the clauses’ effectiveness. *See*, e.g., *Sullins v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 667 A.2d 617, 624 n.3 (Md. 1995) (“To be sure that lead paint poisoning claims were excluded from coverage, Allstate [an insurance company] could have included a provision . . . explicitly excluding such claims.”).


145 *Id.* at 29.

146 There were actually fourteen different exclusion clauses before the court that had been issued from several different insurance companies, but all of the clauses were similar to one another. *See id.* at 30-31.

147 *Id.* at 30 n.12.

148 *See id.* at 32-33. The collateral estoppel doctrine essentially acts to prohibit parties from re-litigating issues that were already decided by a court or administrative body. *See* Jerald D. Stubbs, *Fighting Fraud Illustrated: The Robins AFB Case*, 38 A.F. L. REV. 141, 168 (1994) (“The doctrine of collateral estoppel precludes relitigating issues of fact or law actually litigated and determined in a prior lawsuit . . . . The effect of collateral estoppel attaches not only to judicial proceedings, but also to ad-
Similarly, in In re Asbestos Products Liability Litigation, it fell to the court to determine whether an insurance carrier that had issued a policy expressly excluding asbestos from coverage was entitled to summary judgment on the issue of being liable to the plaintiffs’ claims of injuries stemming from exposure to asbestos. The policy at hand, which was issued by United National Insurance Company (“United”), provided in part that “[t]he insurance does not apply to any liability arising out of . . . ingesting or prolonged physical exposure to asbestos or goods of products containing asbestos [, or t]he manufacture, sale, storage or disposal of asbestos or goods or products containing asbestos.” The court found that the policy’s “clear and unambiguous” language precluded United from being liable to the plaintiffs.

As these last two cases help to demonstrate, the meaning of pollutant has and continues to be heavily litigated, and as will be shown later, this may prove to be one of the key issues in mixed-dust cases. In summary, the most obvious effect, as well as the intent of insurers, behind the creation the “absolute” pollution exclusion clauses (which remains the standard today), as well the more specific pollution exclusion
of the type just examined, was to eliminate any exceptions to the pollution exclusion by removing the “sudden and accidental” proviso.\textsuperscript{157} While the fairly straightforward language of the “absolute” pollution exclusion clause did not prove to be the “elixir” that insurers had hoped, it did serve to alleviate litigation concerning the clauses somewhat.\textsuperscript{158} But given that history is a great predictor of the future, the precise application and meaning of today’s policies, as was the case with the 1986 and other versions, will likely continue to be a source of much dispute and confusion in the courts.\textsuperscript{159} Since the 1986 revision remains the standard today,\textsuperscript{160} it is necessary to examine under what circumstances courts have upheld the use of such clauses, and how they have been interpreted. This, in turn, requires a look into general principles of insurance policy interpretation.

c) \textit{Legal Principles Pertaining to Insurance Interpretation.} At the outset, it must be noted that insurance policies, generally speaking, are considered to be normal contracts, and thus are interpreted as any other contract would be.\textsuperscript{161} As one court has noted, “[t]he goal of interpreting an insurance policy is to ascertain the intent of the parties as manifested by the language of the written instrument.”\textsuperscript{162} This means that courts tend to uphold insurance clauses as valid without regard to whether they are “fair” or not.\textsuperscript{163} The Alabama Supreme Court recognized the majority rule when it

\textsuperscript{157} See, e.g., \textit{Weaver}, 674 A.2d at 977.

\textsuperscript{158} See \textit{Leiter}, \textit{supra} note 123, at 293-97 (listing interpretative issues in CGL policies that were eliminated or reduced by the adoption of the absolute pollution exclusion clause).

\textsuperscript{159} See, e.g., \textit{Bick}, \textit{supra} note 125, at 119 (noting that “[a] new universe of debate is on the rise, namely, the application of . . . the ‘absolute’ pollution exclusions to indoor releases of pollutants”); \textit{Leiter, supra} note 123, at 295 (“[T]he [1986] revised pollution exclusion is not as absolute as the insurance industry no doubt hoped. Several terms remain ambiguous, including the all-important terms ‘discharge, dispersal, release or escape,’ and ‘pollutants.’”); see also text accompanying \textit{supra} note 141; \textit{supra} note 154 and accompanying text (stating that interpretative issues pertaining to pollution exclusion clauses, such as the meaning of “pollutant,” remain a problem).

\textsuperscript{160} See \textit{supra} note 156 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{161} See, e.g., \textit{Cincinnati Ins. Co. v. Zen Design Group, Ltd.}, 329 F.3d 546, 553 (6th Cir. 2003) (“In general, interpretation of insurance policies is governed by the same principles used to interpret ordinary contracts.”).

\textsuperscript{162} Riccio v. American Republic Ins. Co., 683 A.2d 1226, 1231 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1996) (internal quotations omitted). This is buttressed by the “general rule that an insurance company has the right to limit the coverage of a policy issued by it and when it has done so, the plain language of the limitation must be respected.” \textit{Fireman’s Fund Ins. Co. v. Fibreboard Corp.}, 227 Cal. Rptr. 203, 205 (Cal. Ct. App. 1986).

\textsuperscript{163} See, e.g., \textit{Tate v. Allstate Ins. Co.}, 692 So. 2d 822, 824 (Ala. 1997) (“[A] court must not rewrite [an insurance] policy so as to include or exclude coverage that was not intended.”). Of course, this does not mean that courts will blindly “rubber stamp” any insurance policy without regard to its content. In particular, if a court deems that an insurance policy is contrary to public policy, which has been described as “a very unruly horse, and when once you get astride it you never know where it will carry you,” \textit{Story v. First Nat’l Bank & Trust Co.}, 156 So. 101, 103 (Fla. 1934), then the policy will be declared void, and thus unenforceable. See, e.g., \textit{Burt v. Union Cent. Life Ins. Co.}, 187 U.S. 362 (1902) (declaring life insurance policy procured by a man after he was convicted and sentenced to be executed to be against public policy, as his beneficiaries would benefit from his committing crimes); \textit{Tate, 692 So.}
wrote that “[i]t is a GENERALLY accepted principle that if there is no ambiguity in an INSURANCE POLICY, a court is bound to enforce the policy as written and cannot ignore express provisions of the contract.” 164 One court stated this more bluntly:

A court may not "rewrite" an insurance contract, or construe clear and unambiguous language to mean other than what it says. An insured will not be heard to complain that his reasonable expectations were frustrated by policy terms which are clear and unambiguous. 165

Although the preceding method of interpreting insurance agreements, which is typically referred to as “four corners” or formalistic approach, 166 represents the majority rule, 167 another widely used and competing system exists, known as the “reasonable expectations” (sometimes referred to as the “functional”) approach. 168 As its name suggests, under the "reasonable

---

2d 822 (holding that insurance providing coverage for award of punitive damages was contrary to public policy, as honoring it would have thwarted the rationale of punitive damages). Even so, courts are usually reticent to strike down insurance contracts on public policy grounds. See, e.g., T.H.E. Ins. Co. v. DeMutis, No. 98-1683, 1999 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 1561, at *11 (E.D. Pa. Feb. 17, 1999) (“Generally[,] insurance companies are free to decide what risks to undertake and what risks to reject. The power of courts to formulate pronouncements of public policy is sharply restricted; otherwise they would become judicial legislatures rather than instrumentalities for the interpretation of law.”) (internal citations and quotations omitted).

164 Tate, 692 So. 2d at 824.
165 Riccio, 683 A.2d at 1231 (internal citations omitted); accord Fibreboard, 227 Cal. Rptr. at 205 (“In reviewing the terms of an insurance policy, courts must interpret the words according to their plain meaning . . . and will not adopt a strained or absurd interpretation in order to create an ambiguity where none exists.”) (internal citations and quotations omitted).

166 See, e.g., Collins v. Farmers Ins. Co., 822 P.2d 1146, 1159 (Or. 1991):

Under [this] approach, the court looks to the “four corners” of the insurance policy . . . [and the insured is held to have read and to have understood the clear language of the policy. Extrinsic evidence relating to the insurance contract may [only] be examined for the purpose of determining the parties’ intention to an objective analysis of the "four corners" of the contract.

Id. at 1159 (internal citations omitted); see generally Keith A. Rowley, Contract Construction and Interpretation: From the "Four Corners" to Parol Evidence (and Everything in Between), 69 Miss. L.J. 73 (1999) (providing background on the various interpretative techniques that courts employ when dealing with contracts, including the “four corners” approach).


168 See, e.g., Collins, 822 P.2d at 1159 (“Two competing decisional approaches to interpreting insurance contracts have evolved [, including the ‘functional’ or ‘reasonable expectation’ approach.”); see also Jeffrey W. Stempel, Domtar Baby: Misplaced Notions of Equitable Apportionment Create a Thicket of Potential Unfairness for Insurance Policyholders, 25 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 769, 848 (1999) (noting that “Minnesota, like many [other] states, has adopted in [some] form the ‘reasonable expectations’ approach [in interpreting CGL policies]”). Significantly, comment e to section 211 of the Restatement (Second) of Contracts (1981) seems to endorse the “reasonable expectation” method in interpreting insurance contracts, as it provides that “[a]part from government regulation, courts in construing and applying a standardized contract [including insurance policies] seek to effectuate the reasonable
expectation” method, “objectively reasonable expectations of applicants and intended beneficiaries regarding the terms of insurance contracts will be honored even though painstaking study of the policy provisions would have negated those expectations.” It could thus be said that the “reasonable expectations” doctrine is more of a results-oriented, rather than a true interpretive, approach. Essentially, courts that have adopted the “reasonable expectations” approach will go out of their way, even “bend over backward,” to find coverage for insureds, even though neither the policy nor the insurer intended for the coverage to exist.

expectations of the average member of the public who accepts it.” See also id. cmt. e, illus. 4 (suggesting that policy-holder should be provided coverage under policy “without regard to his knowledge or understanding of the quoted language at the time of contracting”). Even so, some courts, such as the Florida Supreme Court, adamantly oppose the doctrine:

We decline to adopt the doctrine of reasonable expectations . . . . To apply the doctrine to an unambiguous provision would be to rewrite the contract and the basis upon which the premiums are charged . . . . [Furthermore,] construing insurance policies upon a determination as to whether the insured’s subjective expectations are reasonable can only lead to uncertainty and unnecessary litigation . . . . [We also note that] after more than twenty years of attention to the doctrine in various forms by different courts, there is still great uncertainty as to the theoretical underpinnings of the doctrine, its scope, and the details of its application.

Deni Assocs. v. State Farm Fire & Cas. Ins. Co., 711 So. 2d 1135, 1140 (1998); see also Peter Nash Swisher, Symposium Introduction, 5 CONN. INS. L.J. 1, 6-7 (1998) (stating that “a number of . . . commentators have been critical of the [doctrine], and [many] courts have expressly rejected [it]”).


See Swisher, supra note 168, at 5 (describing the doctrine as being “result-oriented” as opposed to the “more traditional [formalistic insurance contract analysis]”). It should also be noted that there are several variations to the approach, and the Arizona Supreme Court had an occasion to note some of the more common ones:

1) Where the contract terms, although not ambiguous to the court, cannot be understood by the reasonably intelligent consumer who might check on his or her rights, the court will interpret them in light of the objective, reasonable expectations of the average insured.

2) Where the insured did not receive full and adequate notice of the term in question, and the provision is either unusual or unexpected, or one that emasculates apparent coverage.

3) Where some activity which [sic] can be reasonably attributed to the insurer would create an objective impression of coverage in the mind of a reasonable insured.

4) Where some activity reasonably attributable to the insurer has induced a particular insured reasonably to believe that he has coverage, although such coverage is expressly and unambiguously denied by the policy.


See generally Stephen J. Ware, Comment, A Critique of the Reasonable Expectations Doctrine, 56 U. CHI. L. REV. 1461 (1989) (questioning the motives and correctness of the approach, and providing examples of how courts seemingly ignore express language in policies in their quests to find insurers liable for coverage). For anyone seeking more material on the controversy regarding the reasonable
Returning now to the majority rule, a corollary of the “four corners” approach is that “[a] policy is not made ambiguous by the fact that the parties interpret the policy differently.” And especially important for our purposes is that the rule applies equally to exclusion clauses found within insurance policies, i.e., as long as they are unambiguous and do not violate public policy, they will be upheld by courts employing the majority approach. In particular, many courts have upheld the “absolute” pollution exclusion clauses, such as the 1986 ISO one. According to one commentator, at least two reasons exist for this: First, pollution exclusion clauses are necessary for insurance companies to be able to “continue to serve their function of providing economic stability to their insureds;” Second, the absence of the clauses might lead to intentional or careless pollution by insureds, because they would know that their insurer(s) would be obligated to defend them in any action related to pollutants. But at least one more reason exists: Placing the financial responsibility for pollution that may occur gradually over time on the insured makes sense, since the insured is the party that is in the most advantageous situation to guard against such pollution.

Although the preceding makes it apparent that insurance contracts, including pollution exclusion clauses, are, for the most part, upheld as written by the courts, the general rule is tempered by the constructive principle

expectations doctrine, one excellent source to consult is Swisher, supra note 168 (providing general information on the doctrine and listing many law review articles and pieces both advocating and disparaging its use).

173 Tate, 692 So. 2d at 824.


175 See, e.g., Alcolac, Inc. v. California Union Ins. Co., 716 F. Supp. 1546, 1549 (D. Md. 1989) (“This pollution exclusion [clause] is just what it purports to be—absolute—and the Court perceives no reason why [the insurer] should be denied the benefit of its bargain with [the insured], as reflected in the insurance contract.”) (emphasis added); see also Schultheis, supra note 154, at 493 (noting that “[c]ourts tend to uphold and enforce pollution exclusion clauses”). The 1986 clause is reproduced in the text accompanying supra note 140.

176 See Schultheis, supra note 154, at 493 (stating that courts principally rely on “two [unique] public policy rationales” to uphold pollution exclusion clauses).

177 Id.; see also Nancer Ballard & Peter M. Manus, Clearing Muddy Waters: Anatomy of the Comprehensive General Liability Pollution Exclusion, 75 CORNELL L. REV. 610, 628 (1990) (stating that “[f]rom a public and regulatory point of view, CGL insurance is designed to promote business stability”).

178 See Schultheis, supra note 154, at 493. This concern was shared by the Supreme Court of North Carolina: “Relaxed vigilance is even more likely where the insured knows that the intentional deposit of toxic material in his dumpsters, so long as it is unexpected, affords him coverage. In this case, it pays the insured to keep his head in the sand.” Waste Management of Carolinas, Inc. v. Peerless Ins. Co., 340 S.E.2d 374, 381 (1986).

179 See Peerless, 340 S.E.2d at 381 (noting that the insured is “the party with the most control over the circumstances most likely to cause the pollution”).
known as *contra proferentum* that courts often employ when interpreting contracts. Essentially, this doctrine holds that any ambiguities in a document are to be construed against the drafter, which in this context are obviously insurance companies. The rationale most often cited for this principle is that since it is the drafting party that is in the most advantageous position to secure favorable terms for it and to reduce confusing language in the document that could be construed against the party’s interests, common sense and fairness dictate that any ambiguities should be resolved in favor of the non-drafting party. Because insurance policies, including even the so-called “absolute” pollution exclusion clauses, are often deemed ambiguous, the *contra proferentum* principle is one of great importance in insurance law. Indeed, one authority has labeled it "the most familiar expression in the reports of insurance cases," and virtually every state recognizes the principle.

Having examined in general terms some of the contract law principles that apply to the interpretation of insurance policies, we can now examine how courts have actually used these principles in resolving some of the more common issues that arise in connection with CGL policies, including the prevalent pollution exclusion clauses.

---


181 See, e.g., In re Celotex Corp., 196 B.R. 973, 1003 n.210 (M.D. Fla. 1996) (Labeling the maxim as “the most prominent rule of construction in insurance law”).


183 See generally David S. Miller, Note, *Insurance as Contract: The Argument for Abandoning the Ambiguity Doctrine*, 88 COLUM. L. REV. 1849 (1988) (providing background on the creation and reasons for the *contra proferentum* doctrine). The use of *contra proferentum* in the context of insurance policies is also sometimes justified on the ground that insurance policies essentially amount to contracts of adhesion, thus placing courts in the unenviable position of having to “police” the policies to prevent unfairness. See Voorhees v. Preferred Mut. Ins. Co., 607 A.2d 1255, 1260 (N.J. 1992) (“Because insurance policies are adhesion contracts, courts must assume a particularly vigilant role in ensuring their conformity to public policy and principles of fairness.”); see Ware, supra note 172, at 1463-66 (listing factors applicable to insurance policies that are seen by courts as indicia of adhesion contracts, and describing how courts have dealt with the problem).

184 See, e.g., supra notes 154, 159 and accompanying text.

185 2 GEORGE COUCH ET AL., COUCH ON INSURANCE § 15:74, 334 (rev. ed. 1984); see also note 182 and accompanying text (noting that many courts rely on the doctrine when called on to interpret insurance policies).

186 See, e.g., Kunin v. Benefit Trust Life Ins. Co., 910 F.2d 534, 538-39 (9th Cir. 1990) (“According to the law of California and, indeed, every other state as well as the District of Columbia, ambiguities in insurance contracts must be construed against the insurer.”).

187 Addressing every possible contemporary interpretative issue stemming from pollution exclusion (and there are possibly hundreds of them, see Leiter, supra note 123, at 283 n.120 (recognizing that “more than 800 disputes relating to pollution exclusion clauses in CGL policies have been litigated since 1970”)) is neither possible nor necessary for the purposes of this Comment. Rather, certain key issues
d) Determining the Applicability of Pollution Exclusion Clauses to Particular Factual Situations. As a preliminary matter, and contrary to what many might think, most cases involving pollution exclusion clauses do not hinge on the overall validity of the clauses; rather, courts are typically asked to resolve narrower issues, perhaps chief among which is the applicability of a clause to the fact pattern before it. Probably the threshold issue that must be decided is whether the CGL policy in question is “occurrence-based” or “claims-made,” for this may single-handedly determine whether and to what extent the insured will be provided coverage under the CGL. Under an occurrence-based policy, the policy that was in effect at the time of the event that gave rise to the claim will control, regardless of when the insured posts its claim with the insurance carrier.

Thus, for example, if a coal miner who between the years of 1975-1977 was exposed to pneumoconiosis-developing agents and who develops an illness several years later sues his employer in 1988, and the company then seeks indemnification or other assistance from the insurance carrier, the policy that would determine the extent, if any, of the carrier’s responsibility would be the one(s) in place between 1975-1977, the time of when the event that led to the claim took place.

In contrast, under a claims-based structure, the policy that was in effect at the time the insured files its claims with the carrier will determine what coverage, if any, exists. This, of course, is desirable from the insurance companies’ point of view in the context of pollution exclusion clauses, for the more recent the CGL policy is, the less likely it is that the insured will be provided coverage. So, to vary slightly our previous example involving the miner, if the mining company’s insurance policy was a claims-made one, then the controlling policy would have been the one in place in 1988. This might very well preclude the carrier from being liable, as 1986 marked the year when the insurance industry began adopting the

that seem to be litigated fairly frequently will be discussed in order to demonstrate, and possibly predict, how courts might resolve pollution exclusion cases.

188 See Schultheis, supra note 154, at 493 (“Litigation concerning the current pollution exclusion clause focuses less on the clause’s general validity or whether the facts supporting the underlying claim meet the definition of an occurrence.”).

189 See, e.g., supra notes 154, 159 and accompanying text (providing examples of issues courts must resolve in the context of pollution exclusion clauses).

190 See Julian, supra note 122, at 60 (“Determining the applicable policy begins by ascertaining whether the CGL policy is a claims made policy or an occurrence policy.”).

191 See id. (“This first step of determining [whether] the applicable policy [is based on the occurrence or claims made trigger] can be critical to evaluating the case for coverage.”).

192 See id. Determining the exact time of the occurrence is not always so simple. See id. at 61.

193 See id. at 60.

194 See generally Part II.C.1.a (explaining various changes that CGL policies have undergone, including the reasons for them and how they have lessened insurers’ liability); see also Hartford, 509 U.S. at 770-78 (describing interests of insurance companies and some of the tactics used to accomplish them).


“absolute” pollution exclusion clauses. Incidentally, the most prevalent type of policy today is “claims-made,” which has done wonders from the insurance carriers’ point of view to cut down on their liability towards insureds. This decrease in liability was magnified by the insurance companies’ successful insistence on the inclusion of a retroactive provision that transformed former occurrence-based policies into claims-made ones.

e) The Meaning of “Pollutant” Within Pollution Exclusion Clauses.
Another important and oft-litigated interpretative issue associated with pollution exclusion clauses is the meaning of “pollutant,” for this may very well determine whether the clause will serve to spare the insurer from liability. Although the word is typically defined in CGL policies, courts nonetheless often find themselves faced with the task of determining whether a specific type of pollutant is covered under a CGL. One substance whose status as a pollutant has spawned considerable dispute is lead paint, but among the many other materials that have been alleged by insurance companies to be pollutants are carpet dye used in a private home.

---

195 See supra notes 123, 125, 156 and accompanying text.
196 See, e.g., Julian, supra note 122, at 59 (“Prior to the 1980s, most CGL policies were [occurrence-based]. Since then, virtually all CGL policies take the [claims-made] form.”); Ian Ayres and Peter Siegelman, The Economics of the Insurance Antitrust Suits: Toward an Exclusionary Theory, 63 Tul. L. Rev. 971, 974 (1989) (“New CGL forms are written on a claims-made rather than an occurrence basis.”).
197 See Ayres, supra note 196, at 976 (“The move to a claims-made form . . . eliminated the insured’s coverage for prospective claims made after the expiration of a current policy, the so-called long tail risk.”); Julian, supra note 122, at 59 (“[E]stablishing an earlier occurrence policy as the applicable policy is more likely to result in coverage than under a later claims made policy.”); see generally Hartford, 509 U.S. 764 (describing the insurance industry’s motivations for changing policies from being occurrence-based to claims-made, and the effects of this change).
198 Ayres, supra note 196, at 975: The movement to the claims-made form by itself would not have eliminated insurers’ liability for [all] past injuries . . . . To eliminate their responsibility for these past risks, however, insurance companies changed the CGL forms to include a retroactive provision. This provision ended insurance companies’ liability for injuries that occurred before a certain date, typically the start of the policy term. Id.; see also Hartford, 509 U.S. at 771 (“[T]he insurance industry wanted the ‘claims-made’ policy to have a ‘retroactive date’ provision, which would further restrict coverage to claims based on incidents that occurred after a certain date.”).
199 See supra notes 154, 159 and accompanying text.
200 See Schultheis, supra note 154, at 494 (“[T]he pivotal issue current courts often face revolves around defining pollutants because once something is deemed a pollutant, coverage is barred by the absolute pollution exclusion clause.”); see also infra notes 213-17 (describing case where the court concluded that insurance carrier was not liable on a suit alleging injuries caused by exposure to lead paint after finding that lead was a “pollutant” within the meaning of the carrier’s insurance policy).
201 See supra notes 141-42 and accompanying text.
202 See supra notes 154, 159 and accompanying text.
203 See Schultheis, supra note 154 (analyzing cases that involved the issue of whether lead paint was a “pollutant” under insurance policies).

As explained earlier, courts will apply general principles of contract interpretation when analyzing insurance policies,\footnote{See supra note 161 and accompanying text.} and pollution exclusion clauses are no exception.\footnote{See, e.g., Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Dow Chem. Co., 28 F. Supp. 2d 440, 445 (E.D. Mich. 1998) (court noting that “[t]he general rules of contract construction dictate[d]” its construction of the pollution exclusion clause in question).} Accordingly, when required to interpret the definition of pollutant in a CGL policy, the first step courts take is to determine whether the policy is ambiguous.\footnote{See, e.g., id. at 444 (“If a contract is clear and unambiguous, the court must enforce the contract as written, according to its plain meaning, without looking to extrinsic evidence. It is improper for the court to ignore the plain meaning of the policy’s language in favor of a technical or strained construction.”) (internal citations omitted); see also supra notes 163-165 and accompanying text (recognizing this tendency by the courts).} As it turns out, courts addressing the issue often find ambiguity in the language of CGL policies, particularly as to the meaning of pollutant.\footnote{See supra notes 154, 158-59, 187-88 and accompanying text (addressing some interpretative issues that arise in connection with CGL policies).} However, when a court finds that no ambiguity in the policy exists and that the policy’s pollutant definition encompasses the substance in question, the insurance company will prevail.\footnote{See, e.g., Schultheis, supra note 154, at 486-87 (“From the policy alone, the court must determine what acts by the insured entitle the insured to the duty to defend. If the policy’s terms are unambiguous, the inquiry ends.”); see also supra notes 164-65, 212, and accompanying text (noting that courts typically uphold unambiguous insurance policies and other contracts as written).} This was precisely the case in \textit{St. Leger v. American Fire & Casualty Insurance Company},\footnote{870 F. Supp. 641 (E.D. Pa. 1994).} where the court had to determine whether lead paint was a pollutant under the applicable pollution exclusion clause.\footnote{See id. at 642-43.} The court found that the pollution exclusion clause was not ambiguous, and that the clause’s definition of pollutant included lead paint.\footnote{St. Leger, 870 F. Supp. at 643.} In support of its conclusion, the court found persuasive another opinion in which the court had found that “lead is a chemical that irritates and contaminates.”\footnote{See id. at 643. The case relied on by the court was Kaytes v. Imperial Casualty & Indemnity Company, No. 93-1573, 1994 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21256 (E.D. Pa. Jan. 7, 1994).} The \textit{St. Leger} decision was based on several additional factors, including that ingestion of dust in homes containing lead released by lead paint is the most common cause of lead poisoning in children and that Congress has identi-
fied lead as a pollutant in the context of ambient air quality under the Clean Air Act.\footnote{St. Leger, 870 F. Supp. at 643. For more information on the Clean Air Act, see \textit{supra} notes 131-32 and accompanying text.}

In contrast, when a court charged with interpreting the meaning of pollutant in a pollution exclusion clause finds the term to be ambiguous, it will undergo a much more extensive analysis, namely through the admittance of extrinsic evidence.\footnote{See, e.g., Alabama Plating Co. v. United States Fid. & Guar. Co., 690 So. 2d 331, 335 (Ala. 1996) ("Given th[e] ambiguity in the ‘pollution exclusion [clause],’ we look to extrinsic evidence of the drafter’s intent."); Schultheis, \textit{supra} note 154, at 487 ("Only when the relevant portion of the insurance policy is ambiguous, must the court attempt to construe the meaning of the policy. In doing so, the court may look to extrinsic evidence proffered by the insurer or the insured."). The prerequisite of finding ambiguity before consulting extrinsic evidence is well established, for courts are loath to “create ambiguity where none exists.” See Schilberg Integrated Metals Corp. v. Cont’l Cas. Co., 819 A.2d 773, 794 (Conn. 2003); see also \textit{supra} notes 212 and accompanying text (stating that if a court interpreting a contract deems the document to be unambiguous, its duty ends).}

One substance whose status as a “pollutant” seems rife with ambiguity, and which is particularly relevant to this Comment, is asbestos.\footnote{See, e.g., Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp. v. Allstate Ins. Co., 74 Ohio Misc. 2d 144, 149 (Ohio Ct. Com. Pl. 1993) [discussed in \textit{infra} notes 223-239 and accompanying text] (“It . . . is far from certain whether asbestos constitutes an ‘irritant,’ ‘contaminant,’ or ‘pollutant’ within the meaning of the [pollution] exclusion.”); see also Sylvia Pena-Alfaro, Comment, \textit{The Toxic Mold Terrifying Texas: Mold’s Hold on the Insurance Industry}, 34 ST. MARY’S L.J. 541, 564 (2003) (identifying asbestos as “the most litigated . . . among the indoor air pollutants that cause infirmities”).}

The courts seem to be torn on this issue, with some conclusively finding that asbestos falls within the pollution exclusion clause,\footnote{See, e.g., American States Ins. Co. v. Zippro Constr. Co., 455 S.E.2d 133, 135 (Ga. Ct. App. 1995) (“There is little question that asbestos constitutes a pollutant as unambiguously defined in the exclusion.”); see also \textit{supra} notes 144-48 and accompanying text; \textit{infra} note 237 and accompanying text (instances where asbestos was deemed to be a “pollutant”).} and others reaching the opposite conclusion.\footnote{See, e.g., Maryland Cas. Co. v. W.R. Grace & Co., 794 F. Supp. 1206 (S.D.N.Y. 1991): [The court] finds[s] the language of the provision ambiguous at least with regard to asbestos . . . . [N]othing in the provision suggests that asbestos falls within its terms. One would not usually associate asbestos with the substances listed in the exclusion, namely, smoke, fumes or waste. Those substances bear a closer relation to industrial pollution, the usual subject of the ordinary pollution exclusion. \textit{Id.} at 1229 (internal citations omitted); see also \textit{supra} note 219 (recognizing the confusion surrounding asbestos’ status as a pollutant within the meaning of pollution exclusion clauses).} However, regardless of the substance at issue, courts tend to take a similar approach in determining the meaning of a pollution exclusion clause when the clause is said to be ambiguous,\footnote{See, e.g., supra notes 161, 186, 218 and accompanying text (providing examples of uniformity in courts’ approach to analyzing insurance contracts).} and illustrative of such an approach is \textit{Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation v. Allstate Insurance Company}.\footnote{74 Ohio Misc. 2d 144.} In \textit{Owens-Corning}, the court, faced with determining whether asbestos fibers were a pollutant,\footnote{See \textit{id.} at 147. The definition of pollutant that was at issue was similar to the ones found in the text accompanying \textit{supra} notes 135 and 142.}
commenced its task by analyzing whether the pollution exclusion clause was ambiguous. The court answered this question in the affirmative after noting in part that first, asbestos was not defined anywhere in the exclusion, and second, that it was not undisputed that asbestos was to be considered a pollutant within the meaning of the policy. The court then recalled the principle of *contra proferentum* before moving on with its analysis. Initially, the court very briefly discussed the pollution exclusion clauses’ historical background, and noted that they were created mainly due to insurers’ concerns over “environmentally related losses and liabilities.”

Next, the court turned to the main question before it, namely whether asbestos should be considered a “pollutant” under the clause as a matter of law. The court recognized that many other decisions had classified asbestos as pollutants, but ultimately did not find these to be terribly persuasive because, in the court’s opinion, they were not on point. For instance, one of those decisions had dealt not with pollution exclusion clauses, but rather with the question of whether asbestos was a pollutant under the purview of a federal act. Another of the decisions had primarily focused on “whether the manner in which the material was released affected the applicability of the pollution exclusion.”

---

225 See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 148 (“Initially, [we note that] if the terms of a contract are definite and certain, construction is unnecessary, and the court must apply the plain meaning of the contract . . . .”). As mentioned earlier, determining whether a contract or insurance policy is ambiguous is almost always the first step courts take in their analyses. See supra note 212 and accompanying text.

226 See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 149.

227 Id. at 149 (“A contract of insurance prepared by an insurer and in language selected by the insurer must be construed liberally in favor of the insured and strictly against the insurer if the language used is doubtful, uncertain or ambiguous.”) (quoting Am. Fin. Corp. v. Fireman’s Fund Ins. Co., 239 N.E.2d 33, 35 (Ohio 1968)).

228 Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 150 (emphasis in original). The court additionally noted that “[i]t . . . would appear that general product liability matters were not a chief concern.” See also supra note 125 and accompanying text (mentioning the prominent role that environmental pollution played in the proliferation of pollution exclusion clauses).

229 See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 150-52.

230 See id.

231 See id. at 50. That opinion was United States v. Nicolet, Inc., 712 F. Supp. 1205 (E.D. Pa. 1989), and the act at issue there was the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, see id. at 1206, which is currently codified in Title 42, Sections 9601-9675 of the United States Code (2004). For readers who wish to explore this act further, which was mainly passed to address the problem of hazardous waste sites, see Martin A. McCrory, *Who’s on First: CERCLA Cost Recovery, Contribution, and Protection*, 37 Am. Bus. L.J. 3, 4 (1999), a good starting point would be Payson R. Peabody, Comment, *Taming CERCLA: A Proposal to Resolve the Trustee “Owner” Liability Quandary*, 8 Admin. L.J. Am. U. 405 (1994), which explains, among other things, why the act was passed and the procedures it sets for filing claims against offenders.

Then, the Owens-Corning court turned to authorities that had reached the opposite conclusion, i.e., that did find asbestos to be a pollutant.\textsuperscript{233} The court began by noting that “plentiful authority” demonstrated that the pollution exclusion clauses were created mainly to limit liability relating to toxic waste causing environmental damage, rather than “ordinary” damage like bodily injury to persons.\textsuperscript{234} For example, the court quoted with approval Continental Casualty Company v. Rapid-American Corporation,\textsuperscript{235} which had found that the pollution exclusion clauses at issue did not apply to the plaintiffs’ actions because “[t]he underlying complaints before us do not allege environmental pollution of land, a water course, or the atmosphere, but simply bodily injury sustained by an ultimate user of a product.”\textsuperscript{236}

The Owens-Corning court then acknowledged that some opinions had explicitly classified asbestos as a pollutant within the meaning of pollution exclusion clauses,\textsuperscript{237} but dismissed these as unpersuasive because they “[w]ere [not] supported by [either] case law [or] a compelling rationale.”\textsuperscript{238}

The court proceeded to conclude that asbestos could not be categorized as a pollutant within the meaning of the exclusion.\textsuperscript{239}

\textbf{f) Pollution Exclusion Clauses Relating to Environmental Pollution.} One final issue related to pollution exclusion clauses that comes up fairly often, and is thus worth addressing here, is the applicability of such clauses to incidents that are not related to environmental pollution.\textsuperscript{240} As

\textsuperscript{233} See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 152.
\textsuperscript{234} See id. at 151-52; see generally supra notes 125, 129, 131-34, 228 and accompanying text (describing some of the events that led up to the adoption of pollution exclusion clauses by the insurance industry).
\textsuperscript{236} Id. at 670.
\textsuperscript{237} See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 152. One of those cases was Great Northern Insurance Company v. Benjamin Franklin Federal Savings and Loan Association, 793 F. Supp. 259 (D. Or. 1990), where the court found that “asbestos is a solid irritant,” id. at 263, and that asbestos “is . . . a contaminant within the meaning of the policy,” id. at 264.
\textsuperscript{238} See Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d at 153.
\textsuperscript{239} See id. at 158. The Owens-Corning court had to decide other issues, most of which are tangential to this Comment. One of those was whether the manner in which the asbestos was released was relevant to interpreting the pollution exclusion clause, see id. at 152-55, which the court ultimately found that it was not, see id. at 154. Another such issue was whether the asbestos had been released into the “atmosphere” (which was one of the elements of the pollution exclusion clause), see id. at 154-56, and after relying in part on a dictionary definition of atmosphere, id. at 155, the court concluded that the asbestos fibers in the case at bar had not been released into the atmosphere, see id. at 156.
\textsuperscript{240} See, e.g., Leiter, supra note 123;
noted earlier, it is widely accepted that the original purpose of pollution exclusion clauses, including that of the “absolute” clause, was to curtail insurance carriers’ liability for damages arising out of pollution or other environmentally related disasters. Somewhat expectedly, the courts are in disagreement on this issue: while the majority of them tend to uphold the clause in all applicable contexts, some courts have reached the opposite result.

An opinion illustrative of the majority position is Assicurazioni Generali, S.p.A. v. Neil, where the court was faced with the question of whether a pollution exclusion clause precluded an insurance carrier from being liable to a claim filed against a hotel by former guests who had allegedly suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning during their stay. The plaintiffs argued that the exclusion clause had been intended to eliminate coverage only for injuries arising out of environmental pollution, and not from the type of incident they alleged (carbon monoxide poisoning inside a hotel). Specifically, the plaintiffs argued that carbon monoxide was not a “pollutant” within the meaning of the policy. In rejecting the plaintiffs’ contention, the court found that the language of the policy was “quite expansive . . . [and] exclude[d] from coverage the contamination of any environment by pollutants that are introduced at any time, anywhere, in any way.” The court also found to be of significance other language of the policy that defined “contamination” as “any injurious condition arising out of the presence of pollutants, whether permanent or transient in any environment.” Based on the preceding language and the policy’s definition of pollutant, the court concluded that carbon monoxide, the substance alleg-

Id. at 295; see also supra note 159 and accompanying text (noting that the exact applicability of pollution exclusion clauses is often the source of debate and confusion). This issue was also addressed by the court in Owens-Corning, 74 Ohio Misc. 2d 144, which was discussed in supra Part II.C.1.e.  

241 See text accompanying supra note 234.  

242 See, e.g., Leiter, supra note 123, at 296 n.188; see also supra notes 163-65 and accompanying text (noting that most courts will give effect to the plain meaning of clearly written contracts, including insurance policies).  

243 See, e.g., Sullins, 667 A.2d at 623 (“It appears . . . that the insurance industry intended the pollution exclusion to apply only to environmental pollution. That supports our conclusion that [the pollution exclusion clause] . . . before us [does] not encompass[ ] lead paint, a product used legally and intentionally.”) (emphasis in original); see also supra notes 235-36 and accompanying text (describing case where court found that the plaintiffs’ complaints were not of the type for which the pollution exclusion clauses at issue had been drafted).  

244 160 F.3d 997 (4th Cir. 1998).  

245 See id. at 999.  

246 See id. at 1000-01.  

247 See id. at 1000. The policy defined pollutants as “smoke, vapors, soot, fumes, acids, sounds, alkalies, chemicals, liquids, solids, gases, thermal pollutants and all other irritants or contaminations,” id. at 999-1000, which closely resembles the standard definition found in typical policies, see, e.g., supra note 224.  

248 See Assicurazioni, 160 F.3d at 1000 (emphasis added).  

249 Id. (emphasis added).
edly responsible for causing plaintiffs’ injuries, “plainly f[ell] within th[e] policy . . . .”

As mentioned earlier, however, not every court agrees with the majority approach. According to one commentator, decisions reaching an opposite conclusion from that adopted by the Assicurazioni court, i.e., that standard pollution exclusion clauses found in CGLs apply only to claims stemming from environmental or similar pollution-related events, and not to those involving “ordinary” personal injury or property damage, generally fall into two somewhat related categories. The first of these stems from a sense of public policy or fairness, where courts are tempted to curtail the reach of the pollution exclusion clauses in order to avoid potentially inequitable or absurd results, while the second occurs when courts rely on the “reasonable expectations” doctrine to construe the policies as applying only to “traditional” environmental pollution.

One case exemplifying the first category is Westchester Fire Insurance Company v. Pittsburg, in which the court had to determine whether an insurance company had a duty to defend a city against a lawsuit filed by some of the city’s residents who claimed to have suffered injuries as a result of chemicals being sprayed by one of the city’s vehicles. The case hinged on whether the substance that had injured the plaintiffs was a “pollutant” within the meaning of the policy at issue.

In ruling against the insurance company, the court stated that it was being asked by the insurance company “to stretch the definition of ‘pollutant’ beyond what a reasonable person placed in the position of the insured would have understood the word to mean.” The court further noted that the insurance company’s proposed definition of pollutants would include “any substance or chemical that allegedly causes injury to any person,” and that this construction was unacceptable because “there is virtually no substance or chemical in existence that would not irritate or damage some...
person or property." The court ultimately construed the term pollutant as "not merely any substance that may cause harm . . . , but rather [as] a toxic or particularly harmful material [that] is recognized as such in industry or by governmental regulators."

Illustrative of the second category is *Nautilus Insurance Company v. Jabar.* In *Jabar,* an insurance company maintained that it had no duty to defend a roofing company from a lawsuit brought by a woman who was allegedly injured after being exposed to fumes from the roofing company’s products at her place of employment, for the claim, the company argued, fell within the language of the insured’s pollution exclusion clause.

Initially, the court found that the “total pollution exclusion clause is ambiguous . . . because an ordinarily intelligent insured could reasonably interpret the pollution exclusion clause as applying only to environmental pollution.” This conclusion was based in part on the court’s reasoning that certain terms found in the pollution exclusion clause, such as discharge, dispersal, release, and escape, were considered “terms of art” in environmental law, and that such terms usually refer to damage or injury resulting from environmental pollution. According to the court, this had two effects: first, the insured, a roofing company, could not have been reasonably expected to think that its insurance policy would not have provided protection against the type of suit it was facing. Second, adopting the insurance company’s proposed interpretation of the policy would be unfair to the insured, as this “would [have] render[ed] the [insurance] policy virtually meaningless to [the roofing company].”

---

260 Id. The court’s concern over the expansive breadth of pollution exclusion clauses was shared by the justices deciding *Pipefitters Welfare Educational Fund v. Westchester Fire Insurance Company,* 976 F.2d 1037 (7th Cir. 1992), which involved an issue similar to that found in *Pittsburg.* In interpreting the pollution exclusion language, the *Pipefitters* court noted that “[w]ithout some limiting principle, the pollution exclusion clause would extend far beyond its intended scope, and lead to some absurd results,” id. at 1043, and that “[i]n order to redress this problem, courts have taken a common sense approach when determining the scope of [the policies],” id.; see also supra note 125 (commenting on the seemingly ever-widening exclusionary nature of the clauses).

261 *Pittsburg,* 768 F. Supp. at 1460. In reaching its conclusion, the court seemed to rely in part on the *contra preferentum* doctrine, because in construing the policy against the carrier, the court noted that the company “failed to define the limitations of its pollution exclusion clause in clear and explicit terms.” Id. at 1471. It will be recalled that courts often invoke this doctrine when an insurance policy or contract is deemed to be ambiguous. See, e.g., supra notes 181, 186-87 and accompanying text.

262 See id. at 28. Predictably, the policy’s language was similar to that found in policies addressed earlier. See, e.g., supra note 257.

264 *Jabar,* 188 F.3d at 30.

265 See id.

266 Id. at 30 (“[I]t is entirely reasonable that an ordinarily intelligent insured would understand this provision to exclude coverage only for injuries caused by traditional environmental pollution.”).

267 Id. Ironically, it is likely that this is precisely what the insurance company wanted. See supra note 125.
The court also found ambiguity in the policy’s definition of “pollutant.” In the course of deciding the issue, the court noted that adopting “[a] purely literal interpretation of this language, without regard to the fact pattern alleged in the underlying complaint, would surely stretch the intended meaning of the policy exclusion.” Thus, the court stated that it “agree[d] with those courts which have restricted the exclusion’s scope to only those hazards traditionally associated with environmental pollution,” in part because “[i]t seems far more reasonable that a policyholder would understand the exclusion as being limited to irritants and contaminants commonly thought of as environmental pollutants . . . .” Relying on this reasoning and on the contra proferentum principle, the court ultimately ruled in favor of the insured.

The above discussion should serve to demonstrate the extent of insurance law’s potential influence on the number of mixed-dust claims filed. The focus of the Comment will now turn to proposed federal legislation, in particular the Fairness in Asbestos Resolution Act, that could have a similar, or perhaps even more pronounced, impact on the filing of mixed-dust claims.

D. Potential Federal Legislation Dealing With Asbestos

1. Previous Failed Attempts by Congress to Pass Asbestos Legislation

The number of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis claims filed might also be influenced by Congressional efforts to deal with asbestos. In light of the "elephantine" problem of asbestos, Congress has tried numerous times,
albeit unsuccessfully, to pass legislation dealing with the issue.\textsuperscript{275} The first major attempt at this came in 1998 through the “Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act of 1998,”\textsuperscript{276} whose objective was to “establish legal standards and procedures for the fair, prompt, inexpensive, and efficient resolution of personal injury claims arising out of asbestos exposure, and for other purposes.”\textsuperscript{277} The bill was sent to, and considered by, the Committee on the Judiciary of both the House and Senate, but ultimately nothing came of it.\textsuperscript{278} The following year, a new session of Congress, the 106th, considered a new variation of the 1998 proposed act entitled the “Asbestos Compensation Act of 2000,”\textsuperscript{279} but the bill never went beyond the floor of the House.\textsuperscript{280} Somewhat curiously, the next attempt by Congress to pass legislation aimed
at curbing the problem of asbestos litigation did not occur until earlier in 2003, when several different bills were proposed; 281 among these are the Asbestos Claims Criteria and Compensation Act of 2003, 282 the Asbestos Compensation Fairness Act of 2003, 283 and the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act of 2003, or “FAIR Act of 2003” for short. 284

2. The FAIR Act

More recently, the Senate had occasion to consider the FAIR Act of 2004. 285 In an oversimplified summary, the Act would create an administrative division called the Office of Asbestos Disease Compensation within the Department of Labor that would be responsible for processing both existing and future claims involving asbestos-related injuries. Under the non-adversarial, no-fault scheme of the Act, a claimant would have to prove an entitlement to compensation under a preponderance of evidence standard, and any claims would be paid out from the so-called Asbestos Injury Claims Resolution Fund, which would be bankrolled by companies and insurers, that the Act would create. The Act would also establish the Advisory Committee on Asbestos Disease Compensation that would be responsible for, among other things, streamlining the filing and claims processing procedures and establishing benchmarks to ensure the quality and integrity of the compensation program.

---

281 This does not mean that no type of asbestos legislation was considered during that period. For example, in 2001, the House of the 107th Congress considered (but never passed) bill H.R. 1412, whose purpose was to exempt asbestos settlement funds from federal taxes. See Congress, Bill Summary & Status for the 107th Congress of H.R. 1412, at http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d107:HR01412:@@@L&summ2=m& (last visited Feb. 20, 2006). And in 2002, the Senate of the 107th Congress pondered a (doomed) bill, S. 2641, that would have eliminated, to the extent that was possible, any products containing asbestos. See Congress, Bill Summary & Status for the 107th Congress of S. 2641, at http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d107:SN02641:@@@L&summ2=m& (last visited Feb. 20, 2006).


As with Congress’ previous efforts to enact major asbestos-related legislation, the FAIR Act of 2004 failed to pass. Even so, the Act, along with the other past attempts, evinces Congress’ determination to legislatively solve, or at least diminish, the “asbestos crisis.” And because the FAIR Act garnered a lot of attention, even though it did not pass it is likely a good indication of the sort of legislation Congress might one day enact to deal with asbestos. Thus, it is worth examining a few key aspects of the Act that, as will be addressed in greater detail later, could have a pronounced impact on mixed-dust claims.

The first of these is the Act’s preemption of all other federal and state laws that would conflict with it. Relatedly, the Act would also render void “[a]ny agreement, understanding, or undertaking … with respect to the treatment of any asbestos claim that requires future performance by any party.” As if these features were not enough to establish the Act’s prominence in the realm of asbestos claims, the Act goes on to expressly foreclose the possibility of pursuing asbestos-related claims in other venues. Furthermore, any existing asbestos claims, except for those in which a plaintiff is seeking to enforce an already-entered judgment from which no more appeals may be had, are preempted by the act. Thus, the preemptive nature of the Act would likely impact the number of mixed-dust claims brought in the future.

The other significant part of the Act that merits attention here is that depending on the type of disease alleged, the claimant must, as part of establishing his claim, demonstrate that his disease was not caused by substances other than asbestos. Specifically, claimants alleged to be suffering

---


287 See generally infra Part III.B (discussing how the FAIR Act, if it were to become law, might lead to an increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed).

288 S. 2290 § 403(a) (“The provisions of this Act shall supersede any and all Federal and State laws insofar as they may relate to any asbestos claim . . . .”).

289 Id. § 403(b)(1); see also id. § 403(b)(2) (“Any such agreement, understanding, or undertaking by any person or affiliated group shall be of no force or effect, and no person shall have any rights or claims with respect to any of the foregoing.”).

290 Id. § 403(c) (“The remedies provided under this Act shall be the exclusive remedy for any asbestos claim . . . under any Federal or State law.”); see also id. § 403(d)(1) (“No asbestos claim . . . may be pursued and no pending asbestos claim may be maintained in any Federal or State court, except for enforcement of claims for which an order or judgment has been duly entered by a court that is no longer subject to any appeal or judicial review before the date of enactment of this Act.”).

291 Id. § 403(d)(3) (“Any action asserting an asbestos claim . . . in any Federal or State court, except actions for which an order or judgment has been duly entered by a court that is no longer subject to any appeal or judicial review before the date of enactment of this Act, is preempted by this Act.”).

292 See generally infra Part III.B (analyzing the potential that this feature of the FAIR Act might have on the filing of mixed-dust claims).
from non-malignant Level III, non-malignant Level IV, and non-malignant Level V asbestos diseases must all provide medical documentation “excluding other more likely causes of [his or her] pulmonary condition.” Just as with the Act’s preemptive character just examined, it is likely that this aspect of the Act would affect the filing of mixed-dust claims.

III. POTENTIAL IMPACT OF INSURANCE POLICY EXCLUSIONS AND ASBESTOS LEGISLATION SIMILAR TO THE FAIR ACT ON THE NUMBER OF MIXED-DUST CLAIMS FILED

As suggested by the earlier discussion, the current state of insurance policies, especially as they apply to claims alleging injuries related to asbestos exposure, might lead to an increase in the number of asbestos lawsuits filed under the rubric of mixed-dust claims. The passing of legislation dealing with asbestos claims, such as the FAIR Act, might have a similar effect on asbestos claims being filed as mixed-dust ones. This section will first analyze in further detail why some would-be asbestos plaintiffs might be motivated to file mixed-dust claims instead, and will then examine some problems that they might face in their attempts.

A. How Insurance Law as It Currently Stands Can Affect Asbestos Claims

1. Policies Containing Specific Asbestos Exclusion Clauses

For plaintiffs who are considering filing lawsuits alleging injury caused by asbestos exposure, the most formidable obstacle before them from an insurance standpoint, even more so than the generic “absolute” pollution exclusion clause, is policies that specifically exclude asbestos from coverage. As was noted earlier, aside from the pervasiveness of pollution exclusion clauses in general, it is becoming increasingly more common for insurance companies to include language in their policies that excludes from coverage specific substances, and particularly relevant to this Comment are those policies that single out asbestos.

293 See S. 2290 § 121(d)(3).
294 See id. § 121(d)(4).
295 See id. § 121(d)(5).
296 See id. §§ 121(d)(3)(D)(ii), 121(d)(4)(D)(ii), 121(d)(5)(D)(ii). Expectedly, an evidentiary requirement that is common to all claims under the Act is a showing of “exposure” to asbestos. See id. § 121(d) (categorizing the different levels of compensable diseases).
297 See generally infra Part III.B (discussing this possibility in more detail).
298 See supra note 140 and accompanying text.
299 See, e.g., supra notes 147, 152 and accompanying text.
300 See supra notes 123, 125, 156 and accompanying text.
301 See, e.g., supra notes 143, 147, 152 and accompanying text.
It is, of course, difficult to predict in a vacuum how or whether a particular insurance policy might apply to any given set of facts, especially since the language of insurance policies frequently change. Even so, because it is likely that a policy specifically excluding asbestos from coverage would be declared enforceable and, obviously, applicable to asbestos, there would be an obvious incentive for a plaintiff that is considering filing a personal injury claim to try to get around such an exclusion, possibly by simply not alleging asbestos as an injury-causing agent in the complaint, so that the insurance carrier(s), as well as the defendant(s), might be held liable. This is because many firms are either on the brink of or have already declared bankruptcy as a result of asbestos litigation, and so even if a plaintiff were to win a judgment for his asbestos-related injuries, he might not be able to collect any money from the defendant(s) directly.

302 See, e.g., Consumers County Mut. Ins. Co v. PW & Sons Trucking Inc., 307 F.3d 362, 365 (5th Cir. 2002) (stating that “[w]hen interpreting an insurance policy, [the court] . . . cannot simply consider its terms in the abstract [, but r]ather [should] consider the policy as a whole”) (internal citations and quotations omitted); see Donald A. Winslow, Tax Avoidance and the Definition of Insurance: The Continuing Examination of Captive Insurance Companies, 40 CASE W. RES. 79, 104-05 (1990) (describing case where a court “consider[ed] all the facts and circumstances in determining whether . . . insurance [existed]”). This is so, notwithstanding that “[m]ost CGL policies are virtually identical[, since they are based on] standard forms [that are] traditionally drafted by insurance industry trade associations.” Brian S. Rudick, Comment, The Pollution Exclusion Clause in Pennsylvania: Revisiting Techalloy v. Reliance, 56 U. PITT. L. REV. 885, 891 (1995). See also supra notes 117, 156 and accompanying text (noting the characteristic uniformity among CGL policies).

303 See, e.g., supra note 122 and accompanying text.

304 See, e.g., Pittston Co. Ultramar Am. v. Allianz Ins. Co., 124 F.3d 508, 520 (3d Cir. 1997) (“[W]hen the terms of an insurance contract are clear, it is the function of a court to enforce it as written and not [to] make a better contract for either of the parties.”); see also supra notes 163-65, 175, 242 and accompanying text (recognizing that courts typically enforce policies without modifying them). But see supra note 163 (noting that courts do have the power to render certain insurance policies void on the ground that they are contrary to public policy).

305 Because courts generally will uphold insurance policies that are written clearly, see, e.g., supra note 165 and accompanying text, it is almost inconceivable that a court would find a policy explicitly excluding asbestos from coverage to be inapplicable to a claim alleging injuries stemming from asbestos exposure. See, e.g., Fibreboard, 227 Cal. Rptr. at 205 (“The insurance [policies] eliminated coverage for asbestos-related injuries arising from exposure . . . [and when] a policy of insurance in plain language excludes a particular peril from coverage that language must be respected.”); supra notes 149-53 (similar case); cf. Carey Canada, Inc. v. Columbia Casualty Co., 940 F.2d 1548 (D.C. Cir. 1991) (finding possible ambiguity in the term “asbestosis” as used in a policy’s exclusion clause, and remanding case for a determination as to whether the term encompassed just asbestosis, or all asbestos-related diseases); supra notes 144-48 (discussing similar issue of ambiguity as to the term asbestosis).

306 See Rivlin, supra note 275, at 642-43 (describing the bankruptcy of companies vis-à-vis the asbestos problem); see also H. Ward Classen, An Investigation into the Statute of Limitations and Product Identification in Asbestos Litigation, 30 HOW. L.J. 1, 21 (1987) (noting that “many asbestos manufacturers [could] no longer afford to pay [asbestos] claims” in as early as 1987). Because of this, many asbestos plaintiffs have taken to suing smaller or local companies or defendants, even those who might only have been tangentially linked to the plaintiffs’ injuries, such as a hardware store that at one point might have sold a product containing asbestos or an independent contractor that possibly used asbestos-containing material in his work. See Love & Goldberg, supra note 8, at 18.
2. Possible Duties That Insurers Might Have in Relation to Mixed-Dust Claims Filed

This last point leads to the related issue of what it would mean for the parties involved in an asbestos or mixed-dust lawsuit if it were determined, as a preliminary matter, that the exclusion clause in an insurance policy did not alleviate the carrier from any responsibility in the suit; in other words, the insurance company would not be “let off the hook,” although how and for what the insurer might be held liable would naturally depend on the outcome of the case. Of course, it is hard to predict the exact nature and extent of an insurance company’s liability in any given case, since this would depend on what the policy provided and the facts of the case. Even so, one analyzing in general terms the duties of an insurance carrier under the typical business CGL policy that could be implicated in a claim alleging diseases caused by asbestos or mixed-dust might find two distinct categories, those being to defend the claim and to indemnify the insured defendant from any adverse judgments against it.

To determine whether either duty exists, a separate analysis for each type is required, and this process can be complex in asbestos-related cases. A detailed examination of the exact contours of the analyses is not

---

307 See supra note 116 and accompanying text.
308 See, e.g., Schultheis, supra note 154, at 476, 479-80:

Insurers owe their insureds two contractual duties—the duty to defend and the duty to indemnify. . . . Pollution exclusion clauses attempt to limit or eliminate the duties against claims involving pollution. [However, when the pollution exclusion clause is deemed to not apply, . . . .] the insurer may have a duty to defend and indemnify the insured.

Id.
309 See, e.g., Enron Oil Trading & Transp. Co. v. Underwriters of Lloyd’s of London, 47 F. Supp. 2d 1152, 1160-61 (D. Mon. 1996) (“It is well settled that the duty to indemnify is not necessarily coextensive with the duty to defend. On the contrary, an insurer’s duty to defend is conceptually distinct from and legally independent of its duty to indemnify . . . .”) (internal citations and quotations omitted).
310 See, e.g., Project, An Analysis of the Legal, Social, and Political Issues Raised by Asbestos Litigation (Part 2 of 2), 36 Vand. L. Rev. 573, 709-10 (1983) (“Ascertaining which, if any, insurance companies has incurred the duty to defend and indemnify an asbestos manufacturer is difficult because many different insurers may have insured a manufacturer during the progress of a claimant’s asbestos-related disease.”). An issue that was alluded to earlier in supra notes 127-30 and accompanying text, and which is probably the single most complicated aspect of determining an insurer’s duty, is whether the injury or incident at the heart of the plaintiff’s claim occurred during the coverage period, or whether the policy was “triggered.” See generally James M. Fischer, Insurance Coverage for Mass Exposure Tort Claims: The Debate Over the Appropriate Trigger Rule, 45 Drake L. Rev. 625 (1997) (describing the issue of triggering vis-à-vis insurance policies and the inherent difficulties related thereto, especially as it applies to exposure claims filed in tort). For our purposes, it is enough to say that courts have adopted several types of tests to determine if and when an insurance policy was triggered, including the “manifestation theory,” which looks at the time the victim became aware of the problem, the “injury in fact theory,” which asks when actual damage or physical injury occurred, the “exposure theory,” which focuses on the time that the victim was first exposed to the injury-causing agents, and the “continuous” or “multiple” trigger theory, which contemplates exposure at several different spans of time. See Inland Waters Pollution Control v. Ins. Co., 997 F.2d 172, 183 (6th Cir. 1991) (describing the above tests). As
needed here, and is best left to be addressed by other sources.\textsuperscript{311} It suffices to say that the duty to defend, as its name suggests, imposes an obligation on the insurance carrier to provide legal representation to a defendant being sued,\textsuperscript{312} while the duty to indemnify makes the insurer responsible for the actual judgment entered against a defendant that falls within the coverage of the policy.\textsuperscript{313} Since in most cases, defending against a lawsuit would probably be cheaper than paying the entire resulting judgment, it is perhaps not surprising that a duty to defend is much more likely to be found than a duty to indemnify.\textsuperscript{314} A further difference between the two duties is at what point their existence is determined; the decision regarding a duty to defend is made at the beginning of the lawsuit, while the one regarding a duty to indemnify is made after a verdict or other decision is reached.\textsuperscript{315}

As it relates to this Comment, the practical effect of how courts determine whether there is a duty to indemnify or defend is that, at a minimum, an insurance carrier who has issued a CGL would likely be obligated to defend an insured who is being sued for injuries stemming from asbestos or other similar pollutants,\textsuperscript{316} notwithstanding that the policy might contain a

might be expected, the appropriateness of each type of test depends on which of the various trigger manifestations is provided for in the policy at hand. See, e.g., YWCA v. Allstate Ins. Co., 275 F.3d 1145, 1151 (D.C. Cir. 2002) (“Examination of the language in the [i]nsurers’ policies indicates the appropriateness of applying a [certain] trigger.”). It is not a mere coincidence that most of today’s CGL policies are of the “claims-made” variety. See supra notes 196-98 and accompanying text (documenting insurers’ interests in issuing claims-made policies and some of their attempts to accomplish that goal).

\textsuperscript{311} See Schultheis, supra note 154, at 479-89 (describing how some courts determine whether there is a duty to defend); Enron Oil Trading, 47 F. Supp. 2d at 1160-61 (explaining process to impose a duty to indemnify on an insurer, and how it differs from the one used to find a duty to defend).

\textsuperscript{312} See generally Susan Randall, Redefining the Insurer’s Duty to Defend, 3 CONN. INS. L.J. 221 (1996-97) (describing duty to defend and raising typical questions that arise in association with it).


\textsuperscript{314} See, e.g., Ethicon, Inc. v. Aetna Cas. & Surety Co., 737 F. Supp. 1320, 1330 (S.D.N.Y. 1990) (“[T]he duty to indemnify is far narrower than the duty to defend.”); see also Cyprus, 74 P.3d at 299 (“Because the duty to defend encompasses any potential claims raised by the facts and the duty to indemnify relates to the actual liability imposed, this court has considered the duty to defend to be a broader concept than the duty to indemnify.”); Burt Rigid Box, Inc. v. Travelers Prop. Cas. Corp., 302 F.3d 83, 97 (2d Cir. 2002) (“An insurer’s duty to defend is broader than its duty to indemnify . . . . Indeed, an insurer has a duty to defend even if . . . . the claim may be meritless or not covered [by the policy].”).

\textsuperscript{315} See Ethicon, 737 F. Supp. at 1330, where the court, in deciding whether an insurance provider was liable for indemnifying its insured, stated:

Whereas an insurer’s duty to defend is viewed from the beginning of a lawsuit, the duty to indemnify is decided after the completion of litigation. It is a retrospective, rather than a prospective, determination. The [c]ourt must . . . determine whether the injury found, and the cause of action decided, fit within the insurance policy at issue. . . . [For example, i]n the instant case, the [c]ourt must decide if the findings of the . . . jury, which resulted in a total verdict of almost $12 million for [the defendant in the original action], arose from the type of injury covered by the [insurance] policies.

\textsuperscript{316} This is not only because courts tend to liberally find a duty to defend, see supra note 314 and accompanying text, but also because exactly what constitutes a pollutant within the meaning of a policy
specific\textsuperscript{317} or generic\textsuperscript{318} pollution exclusion. Whether the insurance carrier would ultimately have to indemnify any adverse judgments entered against the insured is harder to predict,\textsuperscript{319} but even if the insurer’s duty were limited to defending the claim, this would still, of course, be helpful to a defendant. In addition, the plaintiff may be further prejudiced if only a duty to defend, and not to indemnify, is found, because the defendant(s) in the case might not be able to pay a judgment in favor of the plaintiff.\textsuperscript{320}

3. Applicability of Pollution Exclusion Clauses to Mixed-Dust Claims Alleging Asbestos

Another interesting question that is raised in conjunction with the applicability of pollution exclusions to mixed-dust claims is what would happen if asbestos were only one of several substances alleged by the plaintiff to have caused his injuries. Such a scenario is hardly only an academic point, for mixed-dust claims, by definition, involve the allegation of at least two injury-causing substances,\textsuperscript{321} and there is a good chance that asbestos could be one of those substances.\textsuperscript{322} It is hard to predict what courts faced with such a situation would do, but two outcomes are likely, depending on the details of the insurance policy: if the policy contained exclusionary language dealing specifically with asbestos,\textsuperscript{323} it is probable that courts would find that an allegation of asbestos in the complaint would be enough to trigger the policy’s exclusion clause, and hence the insurance carrier would be devoid of liability. It is also possible, although unlikely, that the plaintiff might be allowed to proceed with his claim after having been given a chance to modify the complaint to eliminate any references to asbestos.

\textsuperscript{317} See, e.g., supra notes 154, 159 and accompanying text. \textit{But see} Government Employees Ins. Co. v. Ropka, 536 A.2d 1214, 1218 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1988) (“It is generally true that an insurer has no duty to defend a cause of action against an insured if that cause of action asserts liability on the part of the insured that comes within an exclusion in the insurance policy.”); Leiter, supra note 123, at 296 (“The many cases in which courts find the absolute pollution exclusion to be clear and unambiguous far outnumber the few in which courts choose . . . . to grant coverage for the insured.”).

\textsuperscript{318} See, e.g., supra note 143 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{319} See, e.g., supra note 140 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{320} See supra note 314 and accompanying (noting that courts are more willing to find a duty to defend than to indemnify).

\textsuperscript{321} See supra note 306 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{322} See text accompanying supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{323} See, e.g., Mark A. Koppel, Case Notes, Gilliam v. Roche Biomedical Laboratories: An Introduction to Fear-of-Disease Damages in Arkansas, 48 Ark. L. Rev. 555, 567 (1995) (“Possibly the most common examples of toxic tort litigation are the asbestos cases. It has been estimated that the potential number of lawsuits arising from work-related asbestos exposure could be in the millions.”); see also supra note 219 and accompanying text (noting the prominent role that asbestos plays in litigation involving pollution exclusion clauses).

\textsuperscript{323} See, e.g., text accompanying supra note 152.
If, however, the policy only has a general pollution exclusion clause, predicting the outcome would be harder, for one of two things would be possible, depending on whether asbestos were deemed by the court to be a “pollutant” within the meaning of the clause: if the court found that asbestos is indeed a pollutant, then, as explained above, the pollution exclusion clause would most likely shield the insurance carrier from liability, unless the plaintiff were given the opportunity to proceed with his claim sans the asbestos allegation; if the court reached the opposite conclusion, however, then the extent, if any, of the insurance carrier’s liability would likely depend on whether the other injury-causing substances alleged by the plaintiff were classified as pollutants within the meaning of the pollution exclusion clause.

4. Effect of Pollution Exclusion Clauses on Mixed-Dust Claims Alleging at Least One Pollutant Within the Meaning of the Clause

A similar dilemma would arise in a situation where a plaintiff alleges that his injuries were caused by several substances, and a court were to find that only one or some of the substances listed in the complaint were “pollutants” within the meaning of the policy’s pollution exclusion clause at issue. For instance, if a plaintiff alleged that he was suffering from mixed-dust pneumoconiosis caused by asbestos, talc, lead paint, and beryllium, and a court were to conclude that only asbestos and beryllium were pollutants, it is unlikely that the court would dismiss the plaintiff’s suit, since presumably he could still make a prima facie case with the other substances not falling within the purview of the pollution exclusion clause (talc and lead paint in this hypothetical case); rather, the court would probably allow the plaintiff the opportunity to modify his complaint accordingly.

B. Possible Ramifications of Legislation Like the FAIR Act Being Passed

As mentioned earlier, Congress did not enact the FAIR Act of 2004. Even so, given the high number of similar past attempts and the opinion

324 See, e.g., supra note 140 and accompanying text.

325 The reader may recall that a disagreement exists among many courts as to whether asbestos should be qualified as a pollutant under pollution exclusion clauses. See, e.g., supra notes 219-21 and accompanying text.

326 See, e.g., supra note 212 and accompanying text (noting that an insurer’s liability is often determined by the court’s interpretation of the word “pollutant” in the policy’s pollution exclusion clause).

327 See text accompanying supra note 286.

328 See generally supra Part II.D.1 (discussing failed asbestos legislation proposals).
of many influential persons like Chief Justice William Rehnquist that the asbestos situation as it stands can only be remedied through a legislative solution, it is not far-fetched to think that some form of legislation relating to asbestos claims will one day be passed by Congress. Furthermore, because the aim of such legislation would be to prevent persons from filing asbestos-related lawsuits, a corresponding increase in the number of asbestos claims filed under the rubric of mixed-dust is possible.

This may be illustrated by using the FAIR Act of 2004 as an example. Had the Act passed, an increase in mixed-dust claims might have resulted because the Act would have served as the exclusive means for persons suffering from asbestos-related ailments to receive compensation, since the Act would prohibit any asbestos claims from being filed in state or federal courts. Furthermore, the Act would have negated almost all settlements and claims related to asbestos that are already in existence. Simply put, if the FAIR Act or similar legislation were to pass, a plaintiff suffering from asbestos-related ailments who, for whatever reason, wanted to bring his claim in the form of a tort lawsuit in the court system rather than as an administrative claim would have had to either forego his claim altogether, or somehow shape his claim in such a way as to fall out of the legislation’s scope. That is where mixed-dust claims come in.

As explained earlier, one of the things that a claimant must do to receive compensation for certain diseases under the FAIR Act is to establish that his injuries were caused either exclusively or heavily by asbestos. The significance of this is that some plaintiffs whose injuries were at least partly caused by substances other than asbestos would probably not be eligible to apply for compensation under the FAIR Act, and so would look toward filing their claims elsewhere, that is, in the courts. This means that someone who is contemplating filing a lawsuit to recover damages for his asbestos-related afflictions should at least consider the possibility of mold-

329 See supra note 274 and accompanying text.
330 See supra notes 290-91 and accompanying text.
331 See supra note 289 and accompanying text.
332 One such reason might be a belief that the amount available for recovery would be lower than in a lawsuit. See, e.g., Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division, BMWE Legislative Issues – 108th Congress (2004), available at http://www.bmwewash.org/Legislative%20Issues/2004%20-%20Legis%20Issues.htm (last visited Feb. 26, 2006) (describing the FAIR Act of 2004 as a “partisan measure that fails to provide asbestos disease victims fair and certain compensation”). This would be particularly true if mixed-dust lawsuits were considered to be in the nature of either products liability or toxic tort claims, as they likely would be, see, e.g., infra note 405; infra note 401 and accompanying text, because damage awards in products liability cases and toxic tort cases are notoriously large. See, e.g., Neil Vidmar, The American Civil Jury for Auslander (Foreigners), 13 DUKE J. COMP. & INT’L L. 95, 112 (2003) (“[P]roducts liability verdicts [routinely] involve very large awards.”); Scott A. Steiner, The Case Management Order: Use and Efficacy in Complex Litigation and the Toxic Tort, 6 HASTINGS W.-N.W. J. ENV. L. & POL’Y 71, 77 (1999) (“Damages in toxic tort cases are renowned for their enormity.”).
333 See supra notes 293-96 and accompanying text.
ing his complaint to allege diseases other than asbestos as the cause of his injuries so as to escape the purview of the FAIR Act. In other words, limitations like those in the FAIR Act on what types of injury-causing substances are compensable might lead to a corollary increase in the number of asbestos claims filed under the rubric of mixed-dust. Conversely, if legislation like the FAIR Act were to indeed become law, it is likely that some would-be mixed-dust and asbestos plaintiffs would find the no-fault scheme or other features to be attractive, and for that reason might mold their claims accordingly so as to ensure eligibility under the Act, meaning that the only injury-causing substance alleged would be asbestos.

IV. CAUSATION ISSUES IN MIXED-DUST CLAIMS

The preceding discussion on the potential impact that insurance law and future asbestos legislation may have on the number of mixed-dust claims filed would not be complete without addressing the role that the all-important issue of causation would play in such cases. Having said that, an exhaustive look at every facet of the problem is not needed here; rather, this section will first address what are likely to be some of the most prominent causation issues associated with mixed-dust cases, and will then conclude by offering some possible solutions to those issues.

A. Basic Causation Issues Applicable to Mixed-Dust Claims

At its most basic, causation in the tort realm simply refers to the general requirement that in order for a plaintiff to recover damages, he must establish to the satisfaction of the court that his injuries were a result of the defendant’s actions. Naturally, the difficulty of meeting this requirement

334 See supra note 40 and accompanying text (discussing positive and negative aspects of filing workers’ compensation claims as opposed to suing in tort). In fact, some attorneys always favor settling their cases. See, e.g., Bruce L. Hay, Some Settlement Effects of Preclusion, 1993 U. ILL.L REV. 21, 32 (1993) (“Because settling saves litigation costs, risk-neutral parties normally will prefer to settle the case for an amount [that is likely to be accepted by both sides],”); see also footnotes 497-502 and accompanying text (noting possible advantages to settling disputes instead of litigating them).

335 See, e.g., Buckner v. Sam’s Club, 75 F.3d 290 (7th Cir. 1996):

To establish a prima facie [negligence] case, [the plaintiffs] had to present admissible evidence that [the defendant] owed [the plaintiff] a duty, that the duty was breached, and that the breach proximately caused [her] injury. Causation, therefore, is essential, and it means, at a minimum, causation in fact—that is, that the harm would not have occurred “but for” the defendants’ conduct.

Id. at 294 (internal citations and quotations omitted). There is also the matter of the plaintiff having to establish “proximate” or “legal” causation, which is a normative inquiry that asks whether the defendant should be held, rather than was, responsible for the plaintiff’s injuries. See, e.g., Lawrence R. Liebesman & Steven G. Davison, Takings of Wildlife Under the Endangered Species Act After Babbitt v. Sweet Home Chapter of Communities for a Great Oregon, 5 U. BALT. ENVTL. L. 137, 157 (1995) (stating that “proximate causation depends to a great extent on considerations of the fairness of imposing liability for remote consequences”). To the extent that this concerns which parties should, as opposed to
depends on the type and facts of the case the plaintiff alleges, and mixed-dust claims are no exception to this rule, for two reasons.

First, because mixed-dust claims, by definition, involve the allegation of at least two injury-causing substances, it would be hard, if not impossible, for some plaintiffs to convincingly establish which and to what extent particular substances caused his injuries, not to mention the difficulty in proving that a specific defendant or defendants was the source of origin of the substances. Illustrative of this is In Re Liquidation of Midland Insurance Company. In Midland, a former manufacturer of asbestos sought to be indemnified by an insurance company against asbestos-related claims, and although the case was ultimately remanded for further factual development, the court, in the course of its opinion, addressed the inherent difficulty that belies diagnosing and tracing asbestos diseases, and in part noted that “[v]arious factors combine to make it impossible, as a practical matter, to determine which exposure or exposures to asbestos dust caused the disease.” It is likely that the problem presented in Midland would only be made worse in mixed-dust claims, since a plaintiff in such a situation would have to contend with tracing the exposure of not just one substance, but at least two.

Second, most mixed-dust claims could be likened to other “toxic tort” cases, and satisfying the causation requirement in toxic tort cases has those who could, be held responsible for mixed-dust claims, however, such considerations are beyond the scope of this Comment.

See, e.g., In re Ethyl Corp., 975 S.W.2d 606, 616 (Tex. 1998) (stating that “[t]he type of evidence that would be required regarding causation in an asbestos case would vary depending on the length of exposure and the dates of exposure”); see also Ramona L. Paetzold, Same-Sex Sexual Harassment: Can it be Sex-Related for Purposes of Title VII, 1 EMPLOY. RTS. & EMPLOY. POL’Y J. 25, 47 (1997) (noting that “[t]he difficulty in establishing the causation nexus for sexual harassment varies depending on the type of conduct that is alleged to be harassing”).

See text accompanying supra note 5.

See Love & Golberg, supra note 8, at 17 (“[W]ith the many different dusts known to cause lung disease found in industrial and commercial workplaces, it is . . . improbable that a physician will be able to discern which portion of [the lung] scarring is caused by which source.”).


See id. at 27.

See id. at 39.

Id. at 30.

See text accompanying supra note 5.

See, e.g., Jones v. Nathan Trotter & Co., 615 N.Y.S.2d 162 (N.Y. App. Div. 1994); Loupe v. Avondale Shipyards, 470 So. 2d 336 (La. Ct. App. 1985) (both involving mixed-dust claims in which the plaintiff alleged that he was exposed to “toxic” substances). That the substances alleged in a mixed-dust claim may be either organic or inorganic, see supra notes 17-18 and accompanying text, are of little import, for either type can serve as the basis for a toxic tort claim. See, e.g., Castellow v. Chevron USA, 97 F. Supp. 2d 780 (S.D. Tex. 2000) (toxic tort claim in which plaintiff alleged that benzene, an inorganic substance, was responsible for causing decedent’s leukemia); Roche v. Lincoln Prop. Co., 278 F. Supp. 2d 744 (E.D. Va. 2003) (toxic tort case where plaintiffs sued the company that owned their apartment, alleging that they had become sick as a result of being exposed to mold, an organic substance).
always been challenging. 345 An exhaustive analysis of toxic tort cases is unwarranted here, but in an oversimplified manner it can be said that these cases, which are of a relatively modern origin, 346 involve situations in which a plaintiff suffers harm after being exposed to a toxic substance and sues the manufacturer of the substance or the person or company responsible for the exposure having taken place. 347 Among the most prominent examples of toxic tort cases are those involving asbestos, silicone breast implants, tobacco, Agent Orange, and formaldehyde, 348 as well as the relatively new “wave” of toxic mold cases. 349 As was alluded to earlier, the hardest obstacle to overcome for toxic tort plaintiffs is that of proving causation. 350 This is most likely due to a combination of several characteristics that distinguish toxic tort cases from other tort cases, among those being the complex


347 See Ann Taylor, Comment, Public Health Funds: The Next Step in the Evolution of Tort Law, 21 B.C. Envtl. Aff. L. Rev. 753, 756 (1994) (“Toxic torts are the legal actions arising when a person is exposed to toxic substances and harm results.”). For more information on toxic tort cases in general, the reader may wish to consult Allan Kanner, Toxic Tort Litigation in a Regulatory World, 41 Washburn L.J. 535 (2002) and Steiner, supra note 332, which are both excellent sources of guidance on the topic.

348 See Browne, supra note 345, at 2. Many of these cases are brought under a theory of product liability. See id. at 3 n.14 (noting that “[t]oxic tort cases are usually brought under theories of negligence, strict products liability and nuisance, trespass, or liability for abnormally dangerous activities”); Robert F. Blomquist, Emerging Themes and Dilemmas in American Toxic Tort Law, 1988-91: A Legal-Historical and Philosophical Exegesis, 18 S. Ill. U. L.J. 1, 25 (1993) (recognizing that “[t]oxic tort liability theory has definite antecedents in product liability law of the 1960s.”).


350 See supra note 345 and accompanying text; see also Carey C. Jordan, Comment, Medical Monitoring in Toxic Tort Cases: Another Windfall for Texas Plaintiffs?, 33 Hous. L. Rev. 473, 479 (1996) (“[C]ausation usually presents the tallest hurdle in a toxic tort action because the plaintiff cannot establish a straightforward cause and effect relationship.”).
etiology\(^{351}\) of the diseases, the inadequacy of scientific data on toxic exposure and its impact on humans, and the often-long latency between exposure and manifestations of sickness.\(^{352}\)

In any event, in order for a toxic tort plaintiff to satisfy his burden as it relates to causation, he must, at a minimum, prove both that he was exposed to a toxic substance and that the exposure caused the injury he seeks compensation for.\(^{353}\) The first of these prongs can be thought of as “general” causation, because the question asked at this stage is whether the substance(s) in question could have caused the injuries alleged by the plaintiff.\(^{354}\) In contrast, the second part of the analysis, commonly referred to as “specific” causation, is concerned with whether the exposure to the substance(s) in fact caused the plaintiff’s injury.\(^{355}\) Almost invariably, the way a plaintiff would go about proving causation in these circumstances is to present expert testimony or other scientific data, typically in the form of epidemiological or other scientific studies, \(^{356}\) that support his position.\(^{357}\)

\(^{351}\) The study of etiology in this context refers to the determination of a disease’s cause or origin, typically accomplished via a medical diagnosis. See Steven A. Heimberg, Comment, Status of the Emergency Room Psychotherapist: Privacy Rites, 30 UCLA L. REV. 1316, 1317 n.10 (1983).

\(^{352}\) See Taylor, supra note 347, at 757-61 (discussing latency issues in toxic tort cases and how complicated the act of proving causation can be). For a more detailed analysis of these issues, see Jordan, supra note 350, at 479-80 (etiology); Gary E. Marchant, Genetics in the Courtroom: Genetics and Toxic Torts, 31 SETON HALL L. REV. 949, 972-76 (2001) (exposure); and Jesse R. Lee, Medical Monitoring Damages: Issues Concerning the Administration of Medical Monitoring Programs, 20 AM. J. L. AND MED. 251, 256-57 (1994) (latency).


\(^{355}\) See Williams, supra note 353, at 195; Cutler, supra note 354, at 198.

\(^{356}\) Epidemiology is a branch of medicine that is concerned with “the study of the causes, distribution, and control of disease in populations.” Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com/search?r=2&q=epidemiology (last visited Dec. 29, 2003). The discipline is statistical in nature, as its purpose is to “track and compare large groups of individuals over extended periods of time.” Lars Noah, Medicine’s Epistemology: Mapping the Haphazard Diffusion of Knowledge in the Biomedical Community, 44 ARIZ. L. REV. 373, 386 (2002). Thus, for purposes of establishing causation, these studies are considered circumstantial, as opposed to direct, evidence, since they do not concern the individual plaintiff, but rather only allow the fact-finder, based on the statistical information, to infer a link between a toxic substance and the plaintiff’s injury. See Michael C. McCarthy, Note, “Helpful” or “Reasonably Reliable”? Analyzing the Expert Witness’s Methodology Under Federal Rules of Evidence 702 and 703, 77 CORNELL L. REV. 350, 363 (1992) (“[E]pidemiological studies only provide indirect support [to establishing causation], often supplying the basis from which to infer an affirmative answer to the question [of whether a specific substance caused plaintiff’s injury].”).

Other types of studies commonly used by plaintiffs in toxic tort cases include results of animal testing, in vitro experiments, molecular analysis, and case studies. See Cutler, supra note 354, at 199-205 (describing these tests); see also infra notes 356-57 and accompanying text (discussing how causation is typically established in toxic tort suits).

\(^{357}\) See, e.g., Browne, supra note 345, at 71 (“[E]xpert testimony will virtually always be needed in toxic tort cases.”); Williams, supra note 353, at 195 (“In typical toxic tort suits, establishing causation depends on information from expert testimony, including epidemiological studies, case studies, animal studies, and pharmacological studies.”).
B. Possible Evidentiary Burdens to Proving Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims

Being of a scientific nature, the introduction of these types of evidence raises another complex issue, namely whether the evidence satisfy the requirements of admissibility under the rules of evidence of the various states and of the Federal system. It is not necessary to fully address this topic here, but a brief summary of the major issues that come up in this context, using the Federal Rules of Evidence (FRE) as a model, would be informative. The sine qua non of admissibility of all evidence, whether scientific or not, is its relevancy to the case at hand; simply put, if evidence is not relevant, it cannot be admitted. Relevancy is defined as “having any tendency to make the existence of any fact that is of consequence to the determination of the action more probable or less probable than it would be without the evidence.” As this language suggests, the relevancy standard is extremely easy to satisfy, and this is consistent with the Federal Rules

---


361 FED. R. EVID. 402 (“All relevant evidence is admissible, except as otherwise provided by the Constitution of the United States, by Act of Congress, by these rules, or by other rules prescribed by the Supreme Court pursuant to statutory authority. Evidence which [sic] is not relevant is not admissible.”). See also Jill Witkowski, Note, Can Juries Really Believe What They See? New Foundational Requirements for the Authentication of Digital Images, 10 WASH. U. J.L. & POL’Y 267, 273 (2002) (“[U]nder the Federal Rules of Evidence, evidence must first be relevant before it is admissible.”).

362 FED. R. EVID. 401.

363 See Joan L. Larsen, Comment, Of Propensity, Prejudice, and Plain Meaning: The Accused’s Use of Exculpatory Specific Acts Evidence and the Need to Amend Rule 404(b), 87 NW. U. L. REV. 651, 654 (1993) (“Relevance . . . is relatively easy to clear given the liberal standards established by the Federal Rules of Evidence.”).
of Evidence’s skewed approach as a whole towards admissibility of evidence.\footnote{364}{See Eli P. Mazur, Note, Rational Expectations of Lenience: Implicit Plea Agreements and the Prosecutor’s Role as a Minister of Justice, 51 DUKE L.J. 1333, 1350 (2002) (noting that “the Federal Rules of Evidence have a ‘liberal thrust’ favoring the admission of relevant evidence”). This does not mean, of course, that any piece of evidence will be admitted automatically if it is found to be relevant, for even highly relevant evidence may be excluded if, for instance, it is being offered for an improper purpose or if the court determines that the evidence would do more harm than good. See FED. R. EVID. 403 (“Although relevant, evidence may be excluded if its probative value is substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice, confusion of the issues, or misleading the jury, or by considerations of undue delay, waste of time, or needless presentation of cumulative evidence.”); see also Timothy B. Henseler, Comment, A Critical Look at the Admissibility of Polygraph Evidence in the Wake of Daubert: The Lie Detector Fails the Test, 46 CATH. U. L. REV. 1247, 1291 n.286 (1997) (recognizing that “[e]xcludable evidence may in fact be highly relevant”) (emphasis added).}

Assuming that the proposed evidence is found to be relevant in a toxic tort case, there is still the matter of satisfying the requirements applicable to scientific evidence set forth in Rule 702, which embodies a three-pronged test.\footnote{365}{FED. R. EVID. 702: If scientific, technical, or other specialized knowledge will assist the trier of fact to understand the evidence or to determine a fact in issue, a witness qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education, may testify thereto in the form of an opinion or otherwise, if (1) the testimony is based upon sufficient facts or data, (2) the testimony is the product of reliable principles and methods, and (3) the witness has applied the principles and methods reliably to the facts of the case.\footnote{366}{Id. See generally Gregory Todd Jones & Reidar Hagtvedt, Sample Date as Evidence: Meeting the Requirements of Daubert and the Recently Amended Federal Rules of Evidence, 18 GA. ST. U.L. REV. 721 (2002) (analyzing Rule 702 in depth). See Paul S. Miller & Bert W. Rein, “Gatekeeping” Agency Reliance on Scientific and Technical Materials After Daubert: Ensuring Relevance and Reliability in the Administrative Process, 17 Touro L. Rev. 297, 298 (2000) (“[T]he principles laid down by the Supreme Court in Daubert and its progeny [are] now codified in Federal Rule of Evidence 702.”). In Daubert, 509 U.S. 579 (1993), two minor children who were born with birth defects, along with their parents, brought suit against Merrell Dow, the manufacturer of the anti-nausea prescription drug Bendectin, alleging that the birth defects resulted from the mothers’ ingestion of Bendectin during their pregnancies. See id. at 582. The defendant moved for summary judgment, and in support of its motion produced an affidavit by an expert who had concluded that no evidence showing that Bendectin caused birth defects existed. See id. The plaintiffs countered by presenting contrary testimony from no less than eight experts who, based on experiments and research conducted, claimed to have found a link between Bendectin and birth defects. See id. at 583. The district court granted the defendant’s motion for summary judgment because it determined that the expert testimony submitted by the plaintiffs did not pass the then-prevailing Frye test of admissibility, i.e., the plaintiffs had failed to establish that the evidence was generally accepted by the scientific community, and so it could not be considered by the court. See id. at 583-84. The Ninth Circuit Court}}}

Under Rule 702, evidence of a scientific nature may only be admitted if: 1) it is based upon sufficient facts or data, 2) it is the product of reliable principles and methods, and 3) the principles and methods were applied reliably to the facts of the case.\footnote{367}{see id. at 582. The defendant moved for summary judgment, and in support of its motion produced an affidavit by an expert who had concluded that no evidence showing that Bendectin caused birth defects existed. See id. The plaintiffs countered by presenting contrary testimony from no less than eight experts who, based on experiments and research conducted, claimed to have found a link between Bendectin and birth defects. See id. at 583. The district court granted the defendant’s motion for summary judgment because it determined that the expert testimony submitted by the plaintiffs did not pass the then-prevailing Frye test of admissibility, i.e., the plaintiffs had failed to establish that the evidence was generally accepted by the scientific community, and so it could not be considered by the court. See id. at 583-84. The Ninth Circuit Court} This test is essentially a codification of the seminal Supreme Court case \textit{Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals}, which itself replaced the long-standing \textit{Frye} standard for the
of Appeals, also citing to Frye, affirmed the lower court’s ruling. See id. at 584. The Supreme Court granted certiorari to resolve a conflict among the Circuit Courts of Appeal as to whether the Frye standard of general acceptance was the appropriate one for admissibility of scientific evidence. See id. at 585.

In reversing the Ninth Circuit, the Court, after examining the language of Rule 702 and its drafting history, concluded that Rule 702 had superseded Frye’s “rigid ‘general acceptance’ requirement [, which was] at odds with the ‘liberal thrust’ of the Federal Rules and their ‘general approach of relaxing the traditional barriers to ‘opinion’ testimony.’” Id. at 587-89. The Court then outlined the factors that a district court should consider, along with the requirements of Rule 702, when deciding the admissibility of scientific evidence, among which were 1) whether the evidence has been, or could be, tested, 2) whether the evidence has been subject to peer review and publication, 3) the known or potential rate of error associated with the data, 4) the existence and maintenance of standards controlling the accuracy of the evidence, and 5) to what degree the evidence enjoys general acceptance in the scientific community. See id. at 593-94.

An abundance of authority on Daubert and its implications exist. See generally Stan Kitzinger, Note, The Supreme Court Waves Good-Bye to Frye: Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 58 ALB. L. REV. 575 (1994) (providing some background information on the case, as well as a dissection of the opinion); David G Owen, A Decade of Daubert, 80 DENV. U.L. REV. 345 (2002) (tracking Daubert’s influence on later-decided cases, and in particular on district courts’ “gate-keeper” role); William L. Anderson et al., Daubert’s Backwash: Litigation-Generated Science, 34 U. MICH. J.L. REV. 619 (2001) (positing that Daubert has spawned “litigation-generated” science, i.e., scientific evidence that is achieved by tailoring data to meet the needs of its proponent).

See Audrey Rogers, Prosecutorial Use of Expert Testimony in Domestic Violence Cases: from Recantation to Refusal to Testify, 8 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 67, 75 n.29 (1998) (“Daubert rejected the seventy-year-old Frye test of admissibility of expert testimony.”). The Frye test, whose name hails from the 1923 United States District of Columbia Court of Appeals decision in Frye v. United States, 293 F. 1013, was the prevailing standard for the admissibility of scientific evidence in federal courts for nearly seventy years before being rejected by the Supreme Court in Daubert. See supra note 362 and accompanying text. The crux of the Frye test was that in order for scientific evidence to be admitted, the party offering it had to establish to the satisfaction of the court that the evidence was “generally accepted” as reliable by the scientific community. See Ryan McDonald, Note, Juries and Crime Labs: Correcting the Weak Links in the DNA Chain, 24 AM. J.L. AND MED. 345, 359 (1998); supra note 367.

Although no longer used by the federal courts, many states to this day employ the Frye test. See, e.g., Robin Jean Davis, Admitting Expert Testimony in Federal Courts and Its Impact on West Virginia Jurisprudence, 104 W. VA L. REV. 485, 494 n.35 (2002) (“[T]he Frye test is still used today by many state courts as the basis for admitting expert testimony.”).


See supra notes 365-66 and accompanying text.

This is because most mixed-dust claims would be considered toxic tort cases, see supra note 344 and accompanying text, and scientific evidence is almost always needed to be presented in those types of cases in order for a plaintiff to prevail, see supra notes 356-57 and accompanying text.
C. Ways to Prove Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims

Returning now to the issue of how a toxic tort plaintiff would go about proving causation, it would be fruitful to examine the types of evidence a plaintiff alleging a mixed-dust claim could present. Aside from possibly relying on the same type of evidence frequently used in other toxic tort cases, such as epidemiological data or case studies, a mixed-dust plaintiff’s case-in-chief would likely hinge on an expert being able to successfully diagnose the different substances responsible for the plaintiff’s ailments, for without that diagnosis, it would not be possible to link the alleged substances to any particular defendants. The exact mechanics of that process is complex, and because a detailed analysis of it here would be neither necessary nor helpful, a summary will be presented instead.

The way that a diagnosis of mixed-dust disease, i.e., of a disease resulting from at least two substances, is made is through the use of a device known as a scanning electron microscope, which is powerful enough to be able to analyze the atomic particles of the plaintiff’s lung tissue. Based on the results of the microscope’s analysis, qualified technicians would first identify the substances found, and then would prepare a report quantifying the substances’ presence per cubic centimeter of lung tissue. A pathologist would then mine the report for scientific data, as well as

371 See supra notes 356-57 and accompanying text.
373 It will be recalled that by definition, mixed-dust claims always involve at least two substances, see text accompanying supra note 5, so it would be crucial for a plaintiff attempting to make such a case to produce a diagnosis that differentiates between the various substances so that each substance could be linked to the appropriate defendant(s). Linking the cause(s) of the plaintiff’s injury to the actions of a defendant is, of course, needed to satisfy the “specific” causation requirement in toxic tort cases. See text accompanying supra note 355; cf. Part IV.E.2 (describing how some courts have eased causation requirements for plaintiffs in certain cases, including by shifting the burden to defendants to exculpate themselves from being responsible for plaintiff’s injuries rather than requiring the plaintiff to identify which defendants caused his injuries, when doing so would be unfair or unduly restrictive to the plaintiff).
375 See text accompanying supra note 5.
376 See Mealey’s Diagnosis, supra note 372, at 26.
377 See id.
compare the amounts listed in the report to those found in the lungs of disease-free persons that are of similar age and sex to the plaintiff.\[^{378}\]

Assuming that the procedures of the test were followed and that the data culled from the test was not corrupted, there is a fair chance that an accurate diagnosis of mixed-dust, if indeed the plaintiff is suffering from the condition, can be made.\[^{379}\] It is also possible to diagnose mixed-dust pneumoconiosis using simpler, more crude techniques than employing a scanning electron microscope, such as less sophisticated microscopy technology or an examination of tissue slides, but such techniques are not as accurate and can lead to incorrect results.\[^{380}\]

For example, if scanning microscope technology is not possible or available because of monetary costs or logistical concerns, it is still theoretically possible to yield an accurate diagnosis of mixed-dust pneumoconiosis by using a combination of the patient’s exposure history and an analysis of the patient’s chest X-rays and pathology material.\[^{381}\] In the hands of a trained and skilled pathologist, such a technique might allow for the correct separation and identification of the substances at issue because some of their unique characteristics, particularly their shape and size, would likely show up on the X-rays.\[^{382}\] Even so, this technique is hardly foolproof, and an inaccurate diagnosis through its use should always be a concern.\[^{383}\]

The use of a scanning electron microscope affords mixed-dust plaintiffs another advantage apart from more accurate diagnoses; it may also make it easier for a plaintiff to trace the etiology of the disease.\[^{384}\] This might be feasible because an accurate and complete identification and quantification of the particles found in a plaintiff’s lung tissue would go a long way towards associating the particles with the materials that they came

\[^{378}\] See id.

\[^{379}\] See id. at 25-27. Despite the accuracy of the scanning electron microscope, there is no guarantee that a complete and successful diagnosis of mixed-dust disease will always be possible. See, e.g., supra note 338 and accompanying text; see generally Part IV (addressing some of the causation problems mixed-dust plaintiffs might face).

\[^{380}\] See Mealey’s Diagnosis, supra note 372, at 26. One fairly frequent example of a misdiagnosis occurs when mixed-dust disease is mistaken for silicosis, most likely due to the fact that the appearance of silica is often confused with that of other substances. See id. Silicosis is a lung disease associated with the inhalation of silica particles, see text accompanying supra note 22, and is one of the most prevalent occupational lung diseases, see DEMOSTHENES BOIROS ET AL., ASSOCIATION OF MALIGNANCY WITH DISEASES CAUSING INTERSTITIAL PULMONARY CHANGES (2002), http://www.chestjournal.org/cgi/reprint/121/4/1278.pdf (last visited Feb. 26, 2006; on file with author) (identifying silicosis as a “common occupational lung disease”).

\[^{381}\] See Love & Goldberg, supra note 8, at 18.

\[^{382}\] See id.

\[^{383}\] See id.; see also supra notes 379-80 and accompanying text.

\[^{384}\] See Mealey’s Diagnosis, supra note 372, at 26-27; see also supra note 351 and accompanying text (addressing etiology).
from, and perhaps even the manufacturers of such materials.\textsuperscript{385} As mentioned earlier, this is crucial if the plaintiff is to make a successful case.\textsuperscript{386}

D. How Courts Have Handled Causation Issues in Mixed-Dust Claims

Having introduced a few ways through which a mixed-dust plaintiff could establish causation, at this point it would be useful to see how courts faced with mixed-dust claims have handled causation issues. As mentioned earlier, one can find reported mixed-dust cases in the nature of both tort and workers’ compensation.\textsuperscript{387} As can be expected, given that most workers’ compensation cases operate on a no-fault basis,\textsuperscript{388} the level of causation that needs to be established in mixed-dust tort cases, as opposed to mixed-dust workers’ compensation claims, is different.

1. Example of a Mixed-Dust Tort Case Dealing With Causation

One can gleam what type of causation mixed-dust tort plaintiffs might be faced with by examining \textit{Bailey v. North American Refractories Company},\textsuperscript{389} one of the few mixed-dust tort cases reported.\textsuperscript{390} In \textit{Bailey}, employees of a manufacturer of asbestos products sued the company, alleging that exposure to toxic substances during their employment had caused them mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, among other things.\textsuperscript{391} The court ruled that in order for the employees to prevail in their suits, they had to establish by a preponderance of the evidence that their exposure to the substances were a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{385} See Mealey’s Diagnosis, supra note 372, at 26. One powerful example of this technology’s potential is demonstrated by an episode where a pathologist who was asked to make a mixed-dust diagnosis was able to opine, after examining a subject’s lung tissue slide with a scanning electron, that the subject had at one point come into contact with cadmium-containing red paint, presumably at the subject’s workplace. See \textit{id.} at 27. The pathologist came to this conclusion after the microscope analysis revealed a single particle of cadmium, along with an unidentified element. See \textit{id.} The subject’s occupational history, which had not been known to the pathologist, confirmed that the subject had performed auto bodywork for years, including by being involved in the process of sanding paint onto red sports cars, which likely explains the presence of cadmium (found in paint) and the unidentified element (from the sanding process). See \textit{id.}
\item \textsuperscript{386} See, e.g., supra notes 372-73 and accompanying text (addressing the issue of linking injury-causing substances to defendants).
\item \textsuperscript{387} See, e.g., supra notes 59, 60 (examples of mixed-dust workers’ compensation and tort claims, respectively).
\item \textsuperscript{388} See supra note 40.
\item \textsuperscript{389} 95 S.W.3d 868. \textit{Bailey} was mentioned in supra note 60.
\item \textsuperscript{390} See \textit{id.}; supra note 62 and accompanying text. Although not expressly stated in the opinion, the plaintiffs’ case was essentially one based on a products liability theory, as they alleged that “products manufactured by either [of the defendants] exposed [them] to asbestos, thus causing asbestos-related illnesses [including mixed-dust pneumoconiosis].” \textit{Bailey}, 95 S.W.3d at 870. This is not surprising, as a great portion of personal injury asbestos-related lawsuits are categorized as products liability actions. See, e.g., Rutherford v. Owens-Illinois, Inc., 941 P.2d 1203, 1214 (Cal. 1997) (“Most asbestos personal injury actions are tried on a products liability theory.”). The same could be said for other types of toxic tort lawsuits. See supra note 438.
\item \textsuperscript{391} See supra note 60.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
“substantial factor” in the forming of their diseases.\textsuperscript{392} In reaching its decision, the court declined to adopt the “fiber-drift”\textsuperscript{393} or “frequency-regularity-proximity”\textsuperscript{394} causation tests that were advocated by plaintiffs and the defendant, respectively,\textsuperscript{395} reasoning that adopting either test as a matter of law would infringe upon the jury’s prerogative to decide whether the manufacturer was indeed liable for plaintiffs’ injuries.\textsuperscript{396}

2. Example of a Workers’ Compensation Claim Involving Mixed-Dust

Somewhat in contrast to Bailey is Songer, Inc. v. Workmen’s Compensation Appeal Board,\textsuperscript{397} a workers’ compensation case in which an industrial bricklayer alleged that he had been rendered permanently disabled from mixed-dust pneumoconiosis as a result of workplace exposure to several substances, including asbestos and silica.\textsuperscript{398} On an appeal by one of the claimant’s former employers,\textsuperscript{399} the court affirmed an award of workers’ compensation benefits to the claimant, based primarily on the testimony of a doctor who had diagnosed the claimant as suffering from mixed-dust disease after conducting an examination, pulmonary function studies, and X-rays on the claimant.\textsuperscript{400} In other words, in affirming the award of benefits to

\textsuperscript{392} See Bailey, 95 S.W.3d at 871. Incidentally, this is the standard of causation that has been adopted by section 431 of the Restatement (Second) of Torts (1965), which provides in part that “[t]he actor’s negligent conduct is a legal cause of harm to another if . . . his conduct is a substantial factor in bringing about the harm”).

\textsuperscript{393} The fiber-drift theory states that the particles of certain substances, once released in the air, can remain airborne for long periods of time and thus travel substantial distances. See Bailey, 95 S.W.3d at 872; see also Jackson v. Anchor Packing Co., 994 F.2d 1295, 1300 n.6 (8th Cir. 1993) (explaining fiber-drift theory).

\textsuperscript{394} Under the frequency-regularity-proximity test, the plaintiff must demonstrate that he was in close proximity to a specific substance on a regular basis and over an extended period of time. See Bailey, 95 S.W.3d at 872; see generally Lohrmann v. Pittsburgh Corning Corp., 782 F.2d 1156 (4th Cir. 1986) (asbestos case in which the court discusses and adopts the test).

\textsuperscript{395} See Bailey, 95 S.W.3d at 872-73.

\textsuperscript{396} See id.


\textsuperscript{398} See id. at 658.

\textsuperscript{399} The main issue before the court was which of the claimant’s former employers, Songer, Inc. or Pneumatic Concrete Corporation, should be held liable for the employee’s compensation. See id. at 659-660. Songer, the claimant’s most recent employer, argued that Pneumatic should be the one responsible because that is where the claimant had worked the longest, and therefore had presumably been more exposed to injurious substances there than at Songer. See id. at 659-62. The court ultimately sided with Songer, declining to adopt the “last injurious exposure” rule propounded by Pneumatic, and ruled that Pneumatic was the company liable for the claimant’s award. See id. at 661-62. The “last injurious exposure” rule is not uncommon in workers’ compensation scheme, and is mentioned elsewhere in this Comment. See supra note 80 and accompanying text; infra notes 403 (discussing the rule).

the claimant, the *Songer* court practically took at face value plaintiff’s and his doctor’s testimony, and as will be elaborated shortly, this is not atypical in workers’ compensation claims.

E. Facilitating the Obstacle of Establishing Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims

1. How Congress and Some States Have Eased the Causation Standard in Workers’ Compensation Claims

*Songer* is an example of how the legislatures and courts have facilitated claimants’ burden of proving causation in workers’ compensation cases. Had *Songer* been filed as a toxic tort case instead, the claimant would have had to link, by a preponderance of the evidence, the substances allegedly responsible for his injuries to a specific defendant.401 But because this was a workers’ compensation claim, the claimant had no such burden. Rather, he had the benefit of title 77, section 411 of the Pennsylvania Statutes, which provided in part at the time:

The employer liable for compensation [for certain workplace diseases] shall be the employer in whose employment the employee [sic] was last exposed for a period of not less than one year to the hazard of the occupational disease claimed. In the event the employee [sic] did not work in an exposure at least one year for any employer during the three hundred week period prior to disability or death, the employer liable for the compensation shall be that employer giving the longest period of employment in which the employee [sic] was exposed to the hazards of the disease claimed.402

Statutes of this sort undoubtedly make it easier for claimants to be awarded benefits, for their practical effect is to ensure that there will always be at least one employer who can be found liable for a claimant’s compen-

---

401 See text accompanying *supra* note 355.
402 *Songer*, 613 A.2d at 660. The current version of the statute may be found in Title 77, Section 411 of the Pennsylvania Statutes (2003).
sation. Perhaps that is why similar statutes have been enacted in many other states.\textsuperscript{403}

\textit{a) Applicability of Existing Pneumoconiosis Statutes to Mixed-Dust Claims.} In addition to statutes like the one examined above, both states and the federal government have enacted several other types of presumptions intended to facilitate the recovery of workers’ compensation awards for pneumoconiosis injuries that arguably would be applicable to claims involving mixed-dust disease.\textsuperscript{404} This is only arguable, rather than certain, because it is hard to predict the impact that such statutes would have on mixed-dust claims, whether they are in the form of a tort lawsuit or a workers’ compensation claim, given that, by their terms, the statutes seem to deal only with “ordinary” pneumoconiosis, as opposed to mixed-dust pneumoconiosis.\textsuperscript{405} Of course, if it turned out, whether by court decision or some other way, that any existing statutes were deemed to not apply to mixed-dust claims, the legislature of the various states or Congress could either pass new laws or modify the existing ones so as to correct the problem. Thus, the passing of statutes creating presumptions applicable to mixed-dust claims is one way in which the potential difficulties of proving causation in such cases, particularly those filed in tort, could be alleviated.\textsuperscript{406}

2. How Courts Have Relaxed the Method of Proving Causation in Certain Types of Lawsuits

Another way that the problem of establishing causation in mixed-dust lawsuits might be lessened is through the adoption of alternative methods to

\textsuperscript{403} See, e.g., N.Y. WORKERS’ COMP. LAW § 44-a (“The employer in whose employment an employee was last exposed to an injurious dust hazard shall be liable for the payments required by this chapter when disability or death of the employee shall be due to silicosis or other dust disease.”); see also D.C. CODE ANN. § 32-1510; MONT. CODE ANN. § 39-72-303; VA. CODE ANN. § 65.2-403(B); W. VA. CODE § 23-4-8c (2003) (all containing similar provisions); supra note 80 and accompanying text; supra note 399 (discussing the “last injurious exposure” rule).

\textsuperscript{404} Many states have enacted presumptions applicable to workers’ compensation programs. E.g., N.Y. WORKERS’ COMP. LAW § 47 (CONSOL. 2003) (providing that exposures to certain diseases are presumed to be harmful); 77 P.S. § 413 (2003) (creating presumption that certain disabilities arise during a person’s course of employment); TENN. CODE ANN. § 50-6-302 (2003) (stating that persons suffering from certain diseases are presumed to be “totally disabled,” a designation that affects how much benefits they are entitled to receive); W. VA. CODE § 23-4-8c (2003) (providing that deceased persons who were exposed to certain substances for a period of at least ten out of the fifteen years preceding his death are presumed to have been suffering from a chronic respiratory disability at time of death). As for examples of similar presumptions found in the federal code, see supra note 103 (outlining presumptions applicable to pneumoconiosis derived from mining).

\textsuperscript{405} The difference between the two essentially has to do with how they are caused; specifically, “ordinary” pneumoconiosis is caused by one substance, whereas mixed-dust pneumoconiosis involves at least two. See supra note 9 and accompanying text; see generally supra Part I.A (describing the disease).

\textsuperscript{406} See generally Part IV (addressing some of the causation issues mixed-dust plaintiffs might face).
satisfy causation as courts have done in other settings, particularly in the
toxic tort field, as, for instance, with asbestos claims. Classic examples of
this type of “causation relaxation” are Anderson v. Minneapolis, St. Paul &

This legal phenomenon occurs mostly in cases where courts feel sympa-
thetic towards plaintiffs whose injuries were almost certainly the result of
the defendant(s)’s wrongdoing, but for one reason or another cannot satisfy

407 179 N.W. 45 (Minn. 1920). In Anderson, the court was faced with the difficult question
whether a railroad should be held liable for the destruction of plaintiff’s property due to a fire originat-
ing from one of the railroad’s trains even though there was a good chance that another, unrelated fire of
unknown origin would have destroyed plaintiff’s house just the same. See id. at 45-46. The defendant
argued that under the circumstances, the plaintiff could not satisfy the “but-for” because it was impos-
sible to prove that the damage to his property would not have occurred if the railroad fire had never hap-
pened. See id. at 46-47. The court ultimately sided with the plaintiff, and in so doing, approved of the
trial court’s jury instructions, which provided in part:

If you find that other fire or fires not set by one of the defendant’s engines mingled with one that
was set by one of the defendant’s engines, . . . [and if] you should find that the fire set by the en-
gine was a material or substantial element in causing plaintiff’s damage . . . [t]he defendant is li-
able . . . .

Id. at 46. The rule enunciated by the Anderson court has come to be known as the “substantial factor”
down, and it has since become firmly embedded in the legal bedrock, having been adopted by the
Restatement (Second) of Torts and most jurisdictions. See John D. Rue, Note, Returning to the Roots of
the Bramble Bush: The “But For” Test Regains Primacy in Causal Analysis in the American Law Insti-
tute’s Proposed Restatement (Third) of Torts, 71 FORDHAM L. REV. 2679, 2681-83 (2003) (discussing
origin and impact of the “substantial factor” test).

408 199 P.2d 1 (Cal. 1948). The dilemma faced by the Tice court was as vexing and interesting as
the one presented by the facts in Anderson, discussed in supra note 407. In Tice, the plaintiff, a hunter,
suffered injuries to his eye and mouth after having been unintentionally shot at by two of his hunting
companions. See Tice, 199 P.2d at 2. A bench trial determined that both of the defendants had acted
negligently in discharging their weapons towards the direction of the plaintiff in their misguided attempt
at hunting quail, and that the plaintiff’s injuries were a “direct result” of defendants’ actions. See id. at
2. Furthermore, the court cleared the plaintiff of any contributory negligence. See id.

The problem, however, was that it was impossible to determine whether plaintiff’s injuries had been
caused by only one of the men’s shots or by both, since the shots had been fired virtually simultane-
ously, and even if only one of the men had been responsible, the plaintiff probably could not have
proven which of the two men was culpable. See id. This left the court with two unsavory choices:
either allow causation to be proven by an alternative method, or allow the injured and innocent plaintiff
to go uncompensated by the two decidedly negligent defendants. See id. at 2-5. The court chose the
former, and concluded that for “reasons of policy and justice,” it made more sense to shift the burden
of causation to the defendants, in that it was up to each defendant to exculpate himself lest they both face
liability for the plaintiff’s injury; this, instead of imposing upon the plaintiff the formidable task of
proving which defendant had injured him, seemed proper to the court. See id. The impulse to side with
“innocent” plaintiffs over “guilty” defendants is not uncommon. See, e.g., Sindell v. Abbott Laborato-
ries, 607 P.2d 924, 936 (Cal. 1980) (“[A]s between an innocent plaintiff and negligent defendants, the
latter should bear the cost of the injury.”).

The rule set forth in Tice, sometimes known as the “alternative liability” doctrine, is well estab-
lished in American law, see Rue, supra note 407, at 2694-95, and has been applied in various factual
situations. Notable instances are medical malpractice actions where an unconscious plaintiff was almost
certainly injured due to the negligence of one or few of a select group involved in his treatment, see,
e.g., Ybarra v. Spangard, 154 P.2d 687 (Cal. 1944), and products liability cases where the plaintiff was
harmed by a generically defective product and cannot prove which defendant was responsible for the
particular unit that caused his injuries, see, e.g., Anderson v. Somberg, 338 A.2d 1 (N.J. 1975).
the traditional “but-for” causation test, i.e., that had it not been for defendant(s)’s actions, they would not have been injured.\(^{409}\) The courts’ dilemma in this regard is understandable, for as one commentator has noted, “[t]raditional notions of causation were developed before the existence of toxic torts was acknowledged. Applying these tests to toxic tort cases is analogous to placing a square peg into a round hole – [they] just will not fit.”\(^{410}\)

Being mindful of the similar dilemma faced by plaintiffs in toxic tort cases,\(^{411}\) courts over time have built upon the doctrines of *Anderson* and *Tice*, among others,\(^{412}\) to create alternative methods to proving causation that are better suited to the unique nature of toxic tort cases.\(^{413}\) Among these are variants of the substantial factor test recognized in *Anderson*,\(^{414}\) a

\(^{409}\) See, e.g., Lindquist v. City of Jersey City Fire Dep’t, 814 A.2d 1069, 1079-80 (N.J. 2003) (“[W]e recognized that the need for a broader [causation] standard was due in part to the extraordinary and unique burdens facing plaintiffs who seek to prove causation in toxic-tort litigation . . . .”) (internal citations and quotations omitted); Gerald W. Boston, *Toxic Apportionment: A Causation and Risk Contribution Model*, 25 ENVTL. L. 549, 628 (1995) (“The understandable judicial reluctance to preside over a plaintiff’s failure to sustain the traditional burdens of proof has led to a relaxation of causal standards.”); see generally Rue, supra note 407 (tracing the gradual shift in tort law from the traditional “but-for” standard to alternative causation tests employed in certain factual circumstances, and also exploring some reasons for why courts have seen fit to occasionally “bend” the rules of causation).


\(^{411}\) See generally Part IV (exploring some of the causation issues mixed-dust plaintiffs might encounter); see also Schonfeld, supra note 410, at 383 (“To allow for recovery in virtually any asbestos case, . . . courts [would have had to] relax the standard causation requirements. Noting this dilemma, many courts have done just that.”).

\(^{412}\) See supra notes 407-08 and accompanying text.

\(^{413}\) See, e.g., Brinker, supra note 410, at 1302 (In recognition of the uncertainty that surrounds [causation in] toxic torts . . . ., a majority of courts have modified traditional common-law causation rules in the toxic tort context.”); see generally Joseph Sanders & Julie Machal-Fulks, *The Admissibility of Differential Diagnosis Testimony to Prove Causation in Toxic Tort Cases: The Interplay of Adjective and Substantive Law*, 64 LAW & CONTEMP. PROB. 107 (2001) (listing some ways in which courts have attempted to deal with the problem of causation in toxic tort cases); Brian M. DiMasi, Comment, *The Threshold Level of Proof of Asbestos Causation: The “Frequency, Regularity and Proximity Test” and a Modified Summers v. Tice Theory of Burden-Shifting*, 24 CAP. U.L. REV. 735, 738-44 (1995) (tracing the gradual development of various causation tests applicable to asbestos lawsuits).

\(^{414}\) See, e.g., Borel v. Fibreboard Paper Products Corp., 493 F.2d 1076, 1105 (5th Cir. 1974) (in a suit against an asbestos manufacturer, court held that causation could be satisfied with a showing that defendant’s products “contributed substantially” to plaintiff’s injuries); supra note 392 and accompany-
shifting of burden similar to that employed in *Tice*, the application of the “market-share liability” test, the “frequency-regularity-proximity” test, the “inference of exposure” test, the “job site” test, the “fiber-drift” theory, and the “role in the occurrence of plaintiff’s injuries” test. In addition to these, many commentators have proposed the adoption of tests that are either variations of the above, or different altogether.

415 See *DiMasi*, supra note 413, at 744-48 (outlining the employment of burden-shifting in toxic tort cases); see also supra note 403 (describing the development of the substantial factor test in toxic tort cases, and attributing the origin of the test to asbestos cases). Perhaps coincidentally, a comparable, if somewhat weaker, test exists under the FAIR Act’s no-fault compensation scheme to make out a claim for certain diseases. See supra note 296 (noting that for many types of diseases, the FAIR Act requires a claimant to show that there was “exposure” to asbestos).

416 See supra note 394 and accompanying text (describing test and providing an example of an asbestos case in which the court used it).

417 See *DiMasi*, supra note 413, at 744-48 (outlining the employment of burden-shifting in toxic tort cases); see also supra note 403 (describing *Tice* test).

418 See, e.g., *In re Hawaii Federal Asbestos Cases*, 960 F.2d 806, 817-18 (9th Cir. 1992) (adopting test in asbestos case that allows a plaintiff to recover damages by relying on an “inference of exposure,” which can be demonstrated by introducing evidence suggesting that the products of a particular defendant were present in the workplace, and thus that those products might have contributed to the plaintiff’s injuries).

419 See, e.g., *Lockwood v. A C & S, Inc.*, 722 P.2d 826 (Wash. Ct. App. 1986) (allowing plaintiff who allegedly had gotten ill from exposure to asbestos in the workplace to survive motion for directed verdict, even though he had no direct evidence as to which products caused his injuries, or who made them.).

420 See supra note 393 and accompanying text (explaining test).

421 See *Ingram v. Acands, Inc.*, 977 F.2d 1332, 1344-9 (9th Cir. 1992) (asbestos case in which the court held that if “the plaintiff presents evidence that the defendant’s asbestos was present in the workplace, it is the jury’s task to determine if the presence of that asbestos played a role in the occurrence of the plaintiff’s injuries”).

422 See generally Schonfeld, supra note 410 (advocating a four-pronged alternative approach to causation in asbestos cases); Berger, supra note 345 (proposing new model for toxic tort cases whereby plaintiff would only have to prove that a defendant failed to develop and disclose information needed to assess latent risks, rather than that the defendant caused plaintiff’s injuries); Andrew C. Celli, Jr., *Note, Toward a Risk Contribution Approach to Tortfeasor Identification and Multiple Causation Cases*, 65
a) Applicability of Causation Standards Used in Other Types of Toxic Tort Cases to Mixed-Dust Claims. The applicability of these numerous tests to mixed-dust claims, like the applicability of pneumoconiosis statutes to mixed-dust claims, is uncertain. One obvious reason for this is that courts have not yet had many opportunities to apply these tests to mixed-dust claims, given the relatively scant number of tort cases alleging mixed-dust diseases filed thus far. Another reason is that some courts have demonstrated a reluctance to make any further inroads into the already “relaxed” causation rules that are employed in toxic tort cases.

Finally, putting aside the somewhat normative question of whether courts should “borrow” causation tests used in toxic tort cases to resolve mixed-dust tort claims, it is not clear whether at least some of the tests could logically be applied to mixed-dust claims. For instance, the propriety of employing tests modeled after the market share liability doctrine or on the alternative liability theory recognized in $Tice^{228}$ in mixed-dust claims might be called into question, since both of these tests require that plaintiffs be able to at least identify the defendants possibly responsible for their injuries, and this may not always be feasible in mixed-dust claims because of

---

N.Y.U. Rev. 635 (1990) (outlining risk-apportionment and risk-contribution approaches to asbestos cases, under which defendants could be liable for “risk creative behavior,” i.e., making choices that created unreasonable risks of harm to plaintiffs); Brinker, supra note 410 (describing advantages and disadvantages of several alternative methods to traditional causation in toxic tort cases, including variations of the market share liability and burden-shifting doctrines); see also supra note 410 and accompanying text (noting other examples of commentators urging or applauding alternative ways to establish causation in toxic tort cases).

---

423 See supra notes 404-06 and accompanying text.
424 See supra note 62 and accompanying text.
425 See, e.g., supra notes 411-21 and accompanying text (providing examples of how courts have adopted more lenient causation standards in toxic tort cases).
426 See, e.g., Toby M. Tonaki, Comment, Latent Disease and Toxic Torts in Hawaii: Analysis of the Statute of Limitations, the Rule Against Splitting Causes of Action and Nonidentification Theories of Liability, 15 Hawaii L. Rev. 137, 174 (1993) (stating that “[s]ome courts are . . . reluctant to apply [the alternative liability theory] to toxic tort products liability [cases] because plaintiffs must join all possible tortfeasors in court, and plaintiffs have had trouble proving that they joined all the possible tortfeasors”); Jordan, supra note 350, at 479 n.38 (noting that “in the past, [some] courts have been reluctant to rely [solely] upon epidemiological studies to determine causation in toxic tort cases”); Diane Schmauder, An Analysis of New Jersey’s Increased Risk Doctrine, 25 Rutgers L. J. 893, 901 (1994) (recognizing that “[a number of] courts have been [somewhat] reluctant to relax the traditional causation inquiry in the toxic tort context”); Christopher J. Maley, Survey, Toxic Torts: Class Actions in United States and England, 19 Suffolk Transnat’l L. Rev. 523, 526 (1996) (stating that “[h]istorically, [many] judges have been reluctant to certify class actions in mass toxic tort cases”); supra note 416 (describing some courts’ reluctance to allow market share liability to be used in asbestos cases, a type of toxic tort case). Contra supra note 411-13 and accompanying text (recognizing that many courts are more than willing to relax causation requirements in certain types of cases).

427 See supra note 416 (explaining the doctrine and its use).
428 See supra note 408 (providing information on the test and its applications).
429 See Richardson, supra note 345, at 311 n.170 (listing examples of asbestos cases rejecting the validity of the market share liability doctrine where plaintiffs could not pinpoint neither the products that allegedly caused their injuries nor the manufacturers of the products); DiMasi, supra note 413, at
the potential difficulty in tracing the origins of plaintiffs’ diseases.\footnote{\textsuperscript{430} See, e.g., supra note 373 and accompanying text; see generally Part IV (analyzing some of the causation issues mixed-dust plaintiffs might face).} A similar issue might arise if a plaintiff in a mixed-dust case attempted to prove causation by relying on the “fiber-drift” theory, since that would require that the substances responsible for the plaintiff’s injury be identified, a task perhaps easier said than done.\footnote{\textsuperscript{431} See supra note 393 (describing test). As was addressed earlier, mixed-dust cases always involve at least two substances. See, e.g., text accompanying supra note 5.}

In light of these potential problems in applying causation models previously used in toxic tort cases to mixed-dust claims, only time will tell whether and how those tests will impact future cases involving mixed-dust disease. However, in considering the likelihood that these tests will one day be applied to mixed-dust claims, one should be mindful of the courts’ powers to adapt, if need be, existing legal rules and tests to make them better suited for the relatively unique situation of mixed-dust claims,\footnote{\textsuperscript{432} See generally Part IV (describing how the process of proving causation has changed over time, and related issues thereto).} much as legislatures could change existing ordinary pneumoconiosis statutes to ensure that they would apply to mixed-dust pneumoconiosis as well.\footnote{\textsuperscript{433} See supra notes 404-05 and accompanying text.} One thing is practically certain: without any sort of leniency by the courts on the causation requirement, mixed-dust plaintiffs suing in tort would likely face a very heavy burden in winning their cases.\footnote{\textsuperscript{434} See, e.g., supra note 345 and accompanying text; supra note 409 (both capturing the magnitude of how high an obstacle causation is to some toxic tort plaintiffs, including those who might be considering filing mixed-dust claims).}

3. Reducing or Eliminating the Problem of Causation in Mixed-Dust Claims By Using Settlements or Alternative Methods of Compensating Victims

One final way through which the potential causation problems facing would-be mixed-dust plaintiffs might be reduced, or even eliminated entirely, would be to bypass the litigation process altogether, either through the use of settlements or the creation of statutory or judicially-created compensation schemes. These alternatives to litigation are neither new nor un-

\footnote{\textsuperscript{756-57} (describing an asbestos case in which the court “refused to adopt alternative liability . . . because the plaintiff was unable to identify any of the defendant-manufacturer’s products at [his] work site”)(emphasis in original); \textit{see also} supra note 416 and accompanying text (discussing some courts’ reluctance to apply alternative methods of proving causation in toxic tort cases). \textit{But see Somberg}, 338 A.2d 1, and \textit{Sindell}, 607 P.2d 924, discussed at supra notes 408 and 416, respectively (both examples of the majority dismissing dissent’s and defendants’ concerns that not all of the parties that might have caused plaintiffs’ injuries had been joined as defendants in the actions).}
usual, particularly in the field of “mass torts,” a category to which mixed-dust might one day belong.436

a) Using Settlements as an Alternative to Mixed-Dust Litigation. As far as settlements are concerned, it is well known that the vast majority of cases filed end up being settled as opposed to going to trial,437 and in fact, among the most notable settlements ever entered into occurred in the field of “mass torts,” including the celebrated 1998 agreement between tobacco companies and various states worth hundreds of billions of dollars.439

435 As it concerns this Comment, the term “mass tort” refers to a single product or event by one or more defendants that causes widespread injury to many parties. See Barbara Frederick, Comment, Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.: Method or Madness?, 27 CONN. L. REV. 237, 257 n.137 (1994); see Steven L. Schultz, Mass Torts: In Re Joint Eastern and Southern District Asbestos Litigation: Bankrupt and Backlogged—A Proposal for the Use of the Federal Common Law in Mass Tort Class Actions, 58 BROOKLYN L. REV. 553, 554 n.3 (1992) (defining mass torts and grouping them into different categories). There are many who feel that ordinary litigation is just not well suited to mass torts, and thus advocate special or alternative solutions to the problem. See, e.g., Howard M. Erichson, Mass Tort Litigation and Inquisitorial Justice, 87 Geo. L.J. 1983, 2017 (1999) (“[T]he traditional tort system simply does not work in mass tort.”); see generally Anita Bernstein, Formed by Thalidomide: Mass Torts as a False Cure for Toxic Exposure, 97 COLUM. L. REV. 2153 (1997) (providing at least eight reasons for why traditional rules of litigation are ill-suited to the unique characteristics of mass torts); Joseph M. Guzzardo & Jennifer L. Monachino, Note, Gulf War Syndrome—Is Litigation the Answer?: Learning Lessons From In Re Agent Orange, 10 ST. JOHN’S J.L. COMM. 673 (1995) (highlighting problems that plaintiffs face in mass tort litigation, using the Agent Orange litigation as background); cf. supra note 410 and accompanying text (noting examples of commentators who share the belief that ordinary litigation rules should not be used in toxic tort cases, but who advocate changes to the rules, rather than the altogether replacement of mass tort litigation by the adoption of alternative systems of compensation). But see John A. Siliciano, Symposium, Mass Torts and the Rhetoric of Crisis, 80 CORNELL L. REV. 990, 1012 (1995) (analyzing the supposed problems with mass tort litigation in American law, and concluding that “[t]he ‘crisis’ of mass torts may, in the end, [simply] be a crisis of faith”).

436 Even though mixed-dust claims, at least those filed in tort, are relatively few in number today, see supra note 62, it is possible that mixed-dust claims might one day belong to the category of mass torts, as the two might share some characteristics, see generally Kenneth S. Abraham, Individual Action and Collective Responsibility: The Dilemma of Mass Tort Reform, 73 VA. L. REV. 845 (1987) (outlining the “legal characteristics” of mass torts). Specifically, two factors that mixed-dust claims might one day have in common with mass torts is the potential for there to be a large number of claims filed, see generally supra Part III (examining potential future increase in the filing of mixed-dust claims), and the uncertainty about what legal standards and rules would apply in connection with proving causation, see generally Part IV (analyzing issues related to standards of causation potentially applicable to mixed-dust claims). See also supra note 15 (positing how the class-action lawsuit filed by Ground Zero workers may lead to an increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed).

437 See, e.g., Stephen N. Subrin, A Traditionalist Looks at Mediation: It’s Here to Stay and Much Better Than I Thought, 3 NEV. L.J. 196, 222 (2002-03) (“[M]ost cases settle or are otherwise terminated without trial.”); Stephen N. Subrin, Uniformity in Procedural Rules and the Attributes of a Sound Procedural System: The Case for Presumptive Limits, 49 ALA. L. REV. 79, 93 (1997) (“[T]he vast majority of cases—probably over 95%—will terminate or settle prior to trial with or without case management.”).

438 See generally Erichson, supra note 435 (describing settlements, some of which were ultimately unsuccessful, that arose in mass tort cases involving injurious breast implants and asbestos-related injuries).

439 See McClendon v. Ga. Dep’t of Cmty. Health, 261 F.3d 1252, 1253-56 (11th Cir. 2001) (providing background and details on the agreement). Interestingly, this agreement was “the largest settle-
Among the factors that might make the use of settlements a desirable way to deal with a potential future influx of mixed-dust claims are that they reduce the private and social cost of litigation and sometimes allow parties to avoid the hassles of litigation altogether, that they serve to prevent the judicial system from being more backlogged than it already is, that they allow the parties to reach finality in a mutually satisfactory manner while foregoing the risks associated with trial, and that they help companies avoid unwanted negative publicity that is often associated with a public trial.

Of course, not every aspect of settlements are positive; in fact, depending on the circumstances, both the parties involved and society as a whole can be hurt through settlements if they are used inappropriately. For instance, it is not uncommon for wealthy defendants to purposely prolong the litigation process, particularly through the use of discovery, in order to pressure who is likely to be a poorer plaintiff to settle. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who feel that it is defendants who are sometimes a civil lawsuit in history.” Jeffrey Abramson, The Jury and Popular Culture, 50 DePaul L. Rev. 497, 518 (2000).

See generally supra Part III (addressing potential increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed).


See R. Bryan Morrison, Case Note, To Seal Or Not To Seal? That Is Still the Question: Arkansas Best Corp. v. General Electric Capital Corp., 49 ARK. L. REV. 325, 344 n.131 (1996) (“[O]ur civil justice system could not bear the increased burden that would accompany reducing the frequency of settlement. . . . If a large percentage of our cases did not settle, the backlog in our courts would become totally intolerable.”) (internal citations and quotations omitted).

See Neil Vidmar & Jeffrey Rice, Symposium, Jury-Determined Settlements and Summary Jury Trials: Observations About Alternative Dispute Resolution in an Adversary Culture, 19 FLA. ST. U.L. REV. 89, 99 (1991) (“Parties in personal injury disputes often attempt a settlement [because] they want to . . . decrease transaction costs, avoid the risks of trial, and have a final resolution as early as possible.”); see also supra note 334 (noting the preference for settlements that risk-averse parties have).

See, e.g., Andrew K. Craig, The Rise in Press Criticism of the Athlete and the Future of Libel Litigation Involving Athletes and the Press, 4 SETON HALL J. SPORTS L. 527, 548 n.202 (1994) (documenting the controversy surrounding the settlement agreement entered between Michael Jackson and a boy that had accused him of sexual molestation, and noting that many believed Jackson’s settlement amounted to “buying the silence of his accuser”).

See generally Steven Shavell, The Fundamental Divergence Between the Private and the Social Motive to Use the Legal System, 26 J. LEGAL STUD. 575 (1997) (outlining positive and negative aspects of using settlements from a legal, as well as sociological, point of view).

See Ethan A. Heinz, Comment, The Conflicting Mandates of FRE 412 and FRCP 26: Should Courts Allow Discovery of a Sexual Harassment Plaintiff’s Sexual History?, 1999 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 519, 529-31 (1999) (explaining how some lawyers abuse discovery to “force an unfair settlement or withdrawal from the suit,” and providing the example of such practices in sexual harassment suits).
times unfairly pressured to settle due to the threat of massive class action lawsuits, particularly in mass torts, a practice labeled by one court as “judicial blackmail.”

b) Compensation Schemes as an Alternative to Mixed-Dust Litigation. As with settlements, the use of programs that either change or eliminate traditional concepts of litigation have been around for a long time and continue to flourish today, as demonstrated by some compensation schemes that were addressed earlier, such as those in the Black Lung Benefits Act, states’ workers’ compensation programs, and the FAIR Act. Other notable examples of attempts at curbing mass tort litigation by creating alternative methods of compensation include the now-defunct National Swine Flu Immunization Program, through which the federal government accepted primary responsibility for injuries caused by the manufacture, distribution, or administration of this swine flu vaccine; the National Childhood Vaccine Program Injury Act, which established a no-fault compensation program for injuries associated with vaccinations; and the agreement reached in the Agent Orange litigation, which was facilitated through the use of the federal Multi-District Litigation Panel.

448 See, e.g., Paul V. Niemeyer, Comment, Remarks to the Institute for Law and Economic Policy, 39 ARIZ. L. REV. 719, 719-720 (1997) (noting that “[i]n certain situations[,] companies faced even with the threat of a class action [see] settlements as the only economic alternative”); see generally T. Dean Malone, Comment, Castano v. American Tobacco Co. and Beyond: The Propriety of Certifying Nationwide Mass-Tort Class Actions Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23 When the Basis of the Suit Is a “Novel” Claim or Injury, 49 BAYLOR L. REV. 817 (1997) (explaining the compromising situation that defendants are sometimes put in due to class action suits, and noting that the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has labeled settlements achieved as the result of threats of expensive and prolonged litigation as “judicial blackmail”).


450 See generally supra Part II.B.2 (describing the act).

451 See generally supra Part II.B.1 (explaining the procedures that must be followed in Kentucky to initiate a workers’ compensation pneumoconiosis claim there).

452 See generally supra Part II.D.2 (describing the FAIR Act).

453 In re Swine Flu Immunization Prods. Liab. Litig., 89 F.R.D. 695, 699 (1980). For more information on the program, see id. and Erickson, supra note 435, at 2020 n.216.

454 See Dan L. Burk & Barbara A. Boczar, Symposium, Biotechnology and Tort Liability: A Strategic Industry at Risk, 55 U. PITT. L. REV. 791, 852-54 (1994); Erickson, supra note 435, at 2020 n.216 (both providing information on the act). The current version of the act may be found in Title 42, Sections 300aa-34 of the United States Code (2003).

455 See generally Guzzardo, supra note 435 (providing background information on Agent Orange litigation, which centered around war veterans’ claims that chemicals used by the military had caused them various injuries, and why it seemed destined to end in a form other than trial). In the end, the makers of Agent Orange settled with the veterans for $180 million. See id. at 686 n.86.

456 See id. at 684. In 1968, Congress, through the passage of Title 28, Section 1407 of the United States Code (2003), created federal multi-district litigation panels, often referred to as “MDLs,” ostensi-
And just as with settlements, the use of programs or schemes as an alternative to mixed-dust claims would have its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus, while one could certainly say that such a strategy would always be surrounded by controversy, perhaps the more pertinent, as well more unpredictable, question related to the potential future use of settlements and similar programs as alternatives to mixed-dust claims is whether the issue is ripe enough to be fully considered at this point.

Finally, although it is the author’s opinion that the potential for a future increase in mixed-dust claims is certainly real, mixed-dust claims are still in a nascent stage, and so it is hard to predict to what extent, or even whether, settlements and other alternative programs to litigation, including legislation like the FAIR Act, will apply to mixed-dust claims. Thus, as with the earlier predictions concerning the impact that existing statutes dealing with pneumoconiosis and the alternative causation tests employed in toxic tort cases would have on mixed-dust claims, perhaps it could best be said that the question of how or whether settlements and other alternatives to litigation will apply to mixed-dust claims can only be answered with time.

MDLs have proven influential in many monumental cases, including Agent Orange litigation, see Guzardo, supra note 435, asbestos cases, see In re Asbestos Prods. Liab. Litig., 771 F. Supp. 415 (J.P.M.L. 1991), and tobacco-related lawsuits, see In re Tobacco/Governmental Health Care Costs Litig. v. Phillip Morris, Inc., 76 F. Supp. 2d 5 (D. D.C. 1999).

See generally supra notes 441-448 and accompanying text (addressing some positive and negative aspects of settlements).

Compare Robert L. Rabin, Some Thoughts on the Efficacy of a Mass Toxics Administrative Compensation Scheme, 52 Md. L. Rev. 951 (1993) (suggesting that administrative compensation schemes for mass torts are appropriate under certain circumstances) with The American Law Institute’s Reporters’ Study on Enterprise Responsibility for Personal Injury, 30 San Diego L. Rev. 405 (1993) (questioning the use of such schemes, and concluding that a “review of the experience and design of administrative compensation alternatives did not persuade us that this option had a marked advantage over collective judicial processes, at least for the general run of injuries”); see also supra note 435 (recognizing conflicting opinions on the use of alternatives to litigation to address problem of mass tort cases).

See generally supra Part III (examining potential future increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed).

See supra note 62. But see supra note 15 (recognizing the potential influx of mixed-dust claims stemming from Ground Zero).

See generally supra Part III.B (addressing how the passage of the FAIR Act might influence the filing of mixed-dust claims).

See generally Part IV.E.1.a (discussing the applicability of such statutes to mixed-dust claims).

See generally Part IV.E.2.a (examining the possibility that existing causation tests used in toxic tort cases might also be employed in mixed-dust claims).
Mixed-dust pneumoconiosis is a pulmonary disease of predominantly occupational origins that occurs after a person has been exposed to at least two or more organic or inorganic toxic substances over an extended period of time. Cases alleging various forms of this disease have been around since the 1960s, but the greater portion of the reported cases thus far have been in the nature of workers’ compensation claims, and not tort lawsuits. There are definite parallels between the way mixed-dust pneumoconiosis and asbestos-related diseases are contracted. In addition, existing or pending legislation aimed at curbing the asbestos problem, as well as insurance exclusion policies that purport to limit insurers’ liability in terms of defending or indemnifying asbestos-related claims, may have an impact on whether and how much a person may recover for asbestos-related diseases.

Mainly because of these factors, the author posits that in the future, a significant number of would-be asbestos plaintiffs, whose sheer numbers have created a backlog in the courts and whose verdicts have led to many companies declaring bankruptcy, might choose to file their lawsuits under the rubric of mixed-dust claims in an attempt to bypass unfavorable insurance policies or legislation aimed at solving the asbestos problem. This conclusion is tempered somewhat by the fact that although mixed-dust claims have been sporadically filed for several decades, there has yet to be a boom in the number of such claims filed.

In addition, it is hard to predict in a vacuum how or whether courts might apply a particular insurance policy to any given set of facts, especially since the language of policies frequently change. A similar challenge exists as it relates to predicting the role that legislation dealing with asbestos, pneumoconiosis, and the like might have on the filing of mixed-dust claims. Some legislation, like the Fairness in Asbestos Resolution Act, or FAIR Act for short, has not been passed yet, so an obvious obstacle exists in assessing its impact; as for existing laws, many of them, such as those dealing with “ordinary” pneumoconiosis, are perhaps only tangentially related to mixed-dust, so estimating how, or even if, they would apply to mixed-dust claims is tricky. Of course, it is true that legislatures could create new laws or change those already in the books to ensure that they would apply to mixed-dust pneumoconiosis as well.

Making an accurate prediction concerning the number of asbestos suits that might be filed as mixed-dust claims is also made more difficult by the fact that the small number of mixed-dust claims filed in tort means that the applicable legal doctrines, particularly those concerning the plaintiff’s burden of proof as it relates to causation, are not yet well-settled. In the past, courts have not been remiss to adapt traditional ways of proving causation in exceptional cases, such as those involving toxic tort claims where a plaintiff cannot pinpoint the specific defendant(s) responsible for his inju-
ries among a group of many, in order to allow that plaintiff to have his day in court. At the same time, however, some courts have demonstrated a reluctance to adopt “relaxed” methods of proving causation in certain types of cases, or against certain types of defendants. Given this, it is likely that the law concerning mixed-dust tort claims will only be prone to exact ascertainment after a more substantial number of such claims are filed.

Finally, assessing the full magnitude of mixed-dust claims vis-à-vis the legal system is complicated by the possibility that alternatives to litigation, such as court-sanctioned settlements or administratively based compensation schemes, might be adopted in the area. These alternative ways to compensate injured persons are neither new nor unusual, particularly in the field of “mass torts,” to which mixed-dust claims might one day belong. Nonetheless, the impact that such techniques would have on mixed-dust claims is far from certain, particularly since there are many who question the propriety or wisdom of them. The author further posits, in connection with the adoption of alternatives to litigation, that unless courts or legislatures act to reduce some of the burdens that mixed-dust plaintiffs would face in pressing their claims, the mighty obstacle of causation might act to temper any eventual increase in the number of mixed-dust claims filed.

In arriving at this conclusion, the author began by providing, in Part I, a brief medical background of mixed-dust claims, namely in terms of what they are and how they are brought about. Among the topics discussed in that light was how and where mixed-dust diseases are typically contracted, as well as some of the varieties of the affliction and the physical effects that the diseases can have on those affected.

In the next section, Part II, the author examined some workers’ compensation claims involving both ordinary pneumoconiosis and mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, and in doing so, noted similarities in how courts resolve the two types of claims, including the very deferential standard that is shown to lower tribunals’ factual determinations. He then examined state and federal statutes dealing with ordinary pneumoconiosis and mixed-dust pneumoconiosis, including a discussion of some of the features these statutes share. The focus of Part II then shifted to the potential impact that insurance law, particularly pollution exclusion clauses, might have on mixed-dust claims. Within that context, the author analyzed some of the key interpretative issues that courts might struggle with in dealing with the applicability of these policies to particular sets of circumstances. Finally, in Part II, the author addressed some of Congress’ attempts at finding a legislative solution to the asbestos litigation problem in America, particularly the FAIR Act. Specifically, some of the Act’s key features that might influence the number of mixed-dust claims filed were examined.

Part III’s emphasis was predicting how today’s and tomorrow’s insurance law, particularly ever-broadening pollution exclusion clauses, as well as possible future legislation dealing with asbestos, namely the FAIR Act,
might impact the number of mixed-dust claims filed. In connection with the insurance aspect, the author paid special attention to exclusion clauses that specifically deal with asbestos, as well as how those and other types of exclusion clauses affect the duties of insurance carriers in terms of defending or indemnifying claims against insureds. As for the possible ramifications that legislation like the FAIR Act would have on the filing of mixed-dust claims, the author tackled the issue by focusing primarily on certain key aspects of the FAIR Act that might influence whether and how some asbestos plaintiffs might proceed. Among these are that the Act would serve as the only means by which persons suffering from asbestos-related ailments could receive compensation, and that some claimants whose injuries were caused or influenced by substances other than asbestos might not be eligible for recovery under the Act.

In Part IV, the author addressed the role that causation could play in tort suits or workers’ compensation claims involving mixed-dust diseases, in part by comparing the elements of causation that might be implicated in mixed-dust tort claims to those typically encountered in traditional toxic tort cases, as well as by addressing the central causation hurdles that mixed-dust tort plaintiffs might face. Some time was also devoted to likely evidentiary issues that mixed-dust plaintiffs might encounter in their attempts to introduce scientific and medical evidence pertinent to their case. The author next discussed some techniques and strategies that a plaintiff seeking to make out a mixed-dust claim might rely on, including the use of a scanning electron microscope, and then presented examples of how some courts grappling with mixed-dust claims, both in workers’ compensation and tort, have addressed the issue of causation. The author then addressed some ways in which legislatures, mainly through the creation of alternative compensation schemes, and courts, largely by “relaxing” traditional methods of establishing causation, have made it possible for certain persons to recover monetary relief for their injuries. In this connection, the applicability of these existing schemes and judicial doctrines to mixed-dust claims is addressed. In the remainder of Part IV, the author explored the feasibility and desirability of adopting alternatives to litigation, including settlements and no-fault compensation schemes, as a way of dealing with mixed-dust claims.