



Five Things to do if Your Water Or Neighborhood is Polluted

By Shawn Collins, Esq.
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(1) Get smart.

Find out the names of the polluting chemicals. You will usually learn them, as most of our clients have, from a newspaper article or TV story, or from a letter or knock on the door from a government official. You need to know the chemicals' names, so that you can learn about how they may affect your family's health.

A good website with commonsense information about the health effects of most chemicals found in polluted water, air and soil is: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/index.asp. This will help you understand what you must do to minimize, or eliminate, your family's exposure to the pollution.

(2) Get control.

You need reliable information in order to protect yourself and your family. And you need it sooner, rather than later. So, resolve that you will take responsibility for getting answers, and not wait for government, or the polluting company, to decide when to give them to you. Government tends to move slowly, and its resources for protecting the environment are usually stretched very thin.

The polluting company may, in order to save money or its reputation, try to downplay the extent of the pollution it caused, or even deny that there is any problem at all. So don't settle for getting answers, or the problem getting fixed, on *their* timetable. It's *your* family, not theirs, who's living with the problem.

(3) Get noisy.

The old adage that "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" applies to fixing pollution problems. So you must make some noise – to get answers, get heard, and get your problem solved sooner, rather than later. Because polluted water, air or soil typically affect many families, not just one, neighbors can make noise by banding together to do the necessary research, make phone calls, hold informational meetings and rallies, *etc.*

Another way to "make noise" is to enlist the help of local newspapers and television in making the pollution in your neighborhood a high-profile story that helps put pressure on government to fix it. Delays help the company, not the homeowners.



(4) Get a lawyer.

Fighting pollution in your neighborhood is usually very complicated, both scientifically and legally. The company that polluted your neighborhood has usually had a large team of lawyers working – often behind the scenes, and for many years – to get their client "off the hook" for the problem it caused. And those lawyers have hired scientists to help accomplish this goal, usually by offering theories about why the company really didn't do anything wrong, or about how the pollution isn't really as widespread or dangerous as it truthfully may be. Sad as it is to say, their information typically is so biased that it can't be trusted. It's unfortunate, but they've been known to flat-out lie.

You will never have the money that a large company has to pay lawyers, experts, and other scientists. Hiring your own experienced environmental lawyer is the best way to get some power on your side, and use the legal system to help you get the answers and solution that you need.

(5) Get tough.

Don't panic. Once you are armed with reliable information, band together with your neighbors, and hire a good lawyer to do battle with the polluter. This will be the most important steps to protecting your family. While panic is an understandable human reaction to first learning that your family's water, air or soil may be polluted, don't allow those feelings to cause you to lose sight of those steps – like the ones we mention above – that you must take to protect the people who matter to you most.

The opposite of panic – denial – is also an emotion to be avoided. Pretending that there is no problem does not move you and your family away from the harm ... it simply keeps you there.

Get informed. Get represented. Get moving.



Shawn M. Collins, Esq.

An outstanding trial attorney and litigator, Shawn was honored as a finalist for the *Daily Herald* newspaper's "Person of the Year" award for **his work on behalf of the families in Lisle, Illinois to secure a safe source of drinking water after learning their groundwater had been contaminated with trichlorethylene (TCE) from a local manufacturing plant.** The two lawsuits Shawn filed on behalf of these families resulted in settlements of \$10 million and \$16.9 million.

Since 1986, Shawn Collins has combined his powerful communication skills with an unrelenting commitment to his clients' causes to win trials and secure favorable settlements in courts across America. Shawn has been named one of the top 100 trial lawyers from The American Trial Lawyers Association.