

LAW WEEK COLORADO

Lawyers of the YEAR 2010

Fred Bartlit

BARTLIT BECK HERMAN PALENCHAR & SCOTT

What caused the BP oil spill off the Louisiana coast this year?

It's up to Fred Bartlit to find out.

Bartlit was named in July as chief counsel to the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. Bartlit, a partner at Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott's Denver office, is tasked with investigating the root causes of the drilling rig explosion and the failure of the well's blowout preventer.

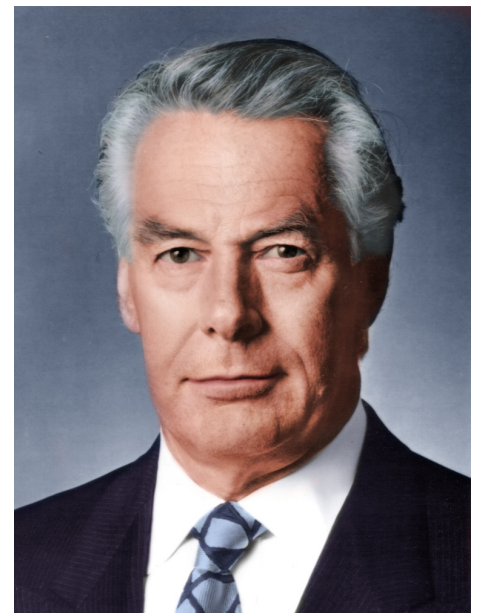
Bartlit is uniquely suited to the job (which he's taken on at the significantly reduced rate of \$65 an hour, capped at 40 hours a week). In 1990, he was trial counsel in the yearlong hearings into a similar oil rig explosion in the U.K., the Piper Alpha North Sea Drilling Platform disaster, which killed 160 people. Bartlit's work into that case helped pinpoint the engineering and regulatory causes of the tragedy.

Bartlit doesn't have subpoena power in the BP oil spill investigation. But the clout he has built up over his 40-plus-year career seems to have overcome that.

"Even without subpoena power, Fred has been able to obtain and unearth information that no other investigative body was able to get," said Bartlit Beck's Sean Grimsley, who is working with Bartlit on the investigation.

For example, Bartlit succeeded where others had failed in getting information from Halliburton about stability tests it had performed on the cement used in the failed well.

"Fred, through the sheer force of his reputation and moral authority, was able to get Halliburton to release the documents to us," Grimsley said.



FRED BARTLIT

In his investigation, Bartlit traveled to Houston and New Orleans to interview witnesses, and he also visited an oil rig similar, but not identical, to Deepwater Horizon.

When the oil spill commission releases its final report, scheduled for Jan. 11, its findings and recommendations for preventing future disasters will be based in part on the investigation Bartlit headed. A more detailed chief counsel's report is expected later that month. •

— Matt Masich, MMasich@CircuitMedia.com