

FINALIST
PUBLIC JUSTICE 2010 TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

City of New York v. Exxon Mobil Corp.

The lawyers from San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City who successfully sued Exxon Mobil Corp. for nearly \$105 million for contaminating the drinking water in Queens with a dangerous chemical compound have been named finalists for the 2010 Public Justice Trial Lawyer of the Year Award.

Victor Sher of Sher Leff in San Francisco and **Robert Chapman** of Greenberg Glusker in Los Angeles led the legal team in representing the City of New York against the oil giant. The team included **Marnie Riddle** and **Nick Campins** of Sher's firm; **Harvey Friedman** and **Julia Haye** of Chapman's firm; and **Susan Amron, Daniel Green, Amanda Goad, Ramin Pejan, Chris Reo** and **Bill Plache** of the New York City Law Department.

In the spring of 2009, the city reached \$15 million in settlements with 22 oil companies that had leaked methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) from gas station storage tanks into wells throughout New York City. MTBE is an additive designed to improve the air quality of gasoline. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, even low levels of MTBE can render water undrinkable because of its taste and color. MTBE can also cause dizziness, nausea, nervous system disorders and, possibly, cancer.

Unlike the other companies sued by the city, Exxon chose to fight the charges in court. *City of New York v. Exxon Mobil Corp.* was the first of nearly 200 MTBE groundwater contamination cases brought by public water suppliers nationwide to go to trial.

Exxon put on a virtually limitless defense, raising complex scientific and technical issues, including MTBE's health effects, hydrogeology, water treatment, gasoline refining and distribution, and air quality.

The landmark jury verdict, awarding the city \$104.7 million for contamination of a backup drinking water system in Jamaica, Queens, came after an 11-week trial.

Sher and Chapman's team is one of five finalists for the award, bestowed annually upon plaintiffs' attorneys who won verdicts, judgments or settlements in cases that pitted them against powerful government agencies or well-heeled private corporations – or both – requiring extraordinary work and dedication.