

atissue

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Connecting you to trending and relevant legal developments in California



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A Word from the Partners

Early in my career, a well-seasoned lawyer shared something with me that has stayed with me for more than 30 years: “The practice of law is a business, but it is a profession first.”

As we continue to expand our practice, I am proud to be part of a group that shares those values. We strive to treat our clients the way we would want to be treated by any professional—a doctor, contractor, lawyer, or other trusted advisor.

For many of our clients, we are their first call when a legal issue arises. If a matter falls outside our area of expertise, we often help quarterback the situation as if it were our own, connecting clients with the right resources and guidance.

As we reach the halfway mark of 2026, we wish you and your families all the very best for the remainder of the year.

Gregory E. Stone
Partner

Exciting Expansion: Groveman | Hiete LLP's Environmental Practice Joins Stone | Dean LLP

Stone | Dean LLP is pleased to announce a significant enhancement to its capabilities with the integration of the respected environmental law practice group led by Barry C. Groveman and Ryan Hiete. Previously operating as Groveman Hiete LLP, this highly experienced team is now bringing its specialized expertise in environmental law to Stone | Dean's Woodland Hills office, expanding the firm's ability to serve clients across a broader spectrum of legal and business challenges.

This strategic transition represents a natural evolution for both practices. Stone | Dean has long been recognized as a trusted advisor to California businesses, entrepreneurs, employers, retail operations, transportation companies, insurance professionals, and others—delivering pragmatic, cost-effective solutions in areas such as commercial litigation, business formation and transactions, employment matters, insurance coverage, and premises liability. While the firm has built a strong foundation in these core disciplines, environmental regulatory and compliance issues have often required coordination with outside specialists. The addition of Groveman | Hiete's group fills that gap seamlessly, allowing Stone | Dean to offer comprehensive, in-house environmental and regulatory counsel under one roof.

By way of very brief background, Barry and Ryan bring decades of focused experience in environmental law, having represented public agencies, Fortune 500 companies, medium to small private businesses, real estate owners and developers, banking institutions, and individuals in some of California's most complex and high-stakes environmental matters. Their practice, established through Groveman Hiete LLP since 2019 [and dating back to the 1980s], emphasizes aggressive yet practical advocacy, responsive service, and cost-effective strategies tailored to each client's unique needs.

The environmental practice group excels in a wide range of areas critical to modern businesses and public entities operating in California's heavily regulated landscape. Key practice strengths include:

- Environmental Compliance and Regulatory Counseling — Guiding clients through federal, state, and local regulations under statutes such as CEQA, NEPA, the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, RCRA, CERCLA (Superfund), Proposition 65, and California's extensive hazardous waste and water quality programs. The team helps clients navigate permitting processes, develop compliance programs, and respond proactively to agency inquiries to minimize risk and avoid enforcement actions.

- Environmental Litigation and Dispute Resolution — Handling complex litigation involving environmental claims, including cost recovery actions, contribution claims under CERCLA, private party disputes, toxic torts, and challenges to agency decisions. The group has successfully represented clients in both defense and affirmative roles, often achieving favorable settlements or trial outcomes in matters involving soil and groundwater contamination, air emissions, hazardous materials handling, and natural resource damages.
- Occupational Safety and Health — Providing counsel on OSHA and Cal/OSHA compliance, workplace safety investigations, and defense against citations or enforcement actions related to environmental health hazards.
- Land Use and Development-Related Environmental Issues — Assisting developers, property owners, and public agencies with environmental impact assessments, mitigation measures, brownfields redevelopment, and entitlement processes that intersect with environmental requirements.
- Crisis Response and Enforcement Defense — Offering immediate, strategic support during environmental incidents, spills [chemical, oil and hazardous materials], or regulatory inspections, including coordination with local, state and federal government agencies, public communications, and defense against civil and/or criminal enforcement.

Clients of Stone | Dean can now benefit from this deepened expertise in several meaningful ways. First, the firm can deliver more integrated, efficient advice when regulatory, compliance and environmental issues arise in the context of broader business or litigation matters—whether that involves a commercial real estate transaction, an employment dispute with workplace exposure elements, a premises liability claim tied to contamination, or insurance coverage analysis for environmental liabilities. No longer must clients engage separate firms or manage fragmented advice; Stone | Dean provides a unified team approach that streamlines communication, reduces costs, and enhances overall outcomes.

Second, the addition brings proactive risk management capabilities that align perfectly with Stone | Dean's problem-solving philosophy.

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Welcome Aboard!

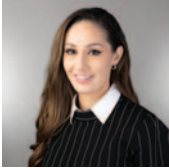
NEW PARTNERS



BARRY GROVEMAN joins Stone | Dean LLP as Partner and brings over three decades of experience in environmental, administrative, civil, and criminal law. Known for his leadership in high-stakes litigation and regulatory enforcement, he has represented public entities, multinational corporations, and individual clients across a broad range of complex matters. His distinguished background in government and private practice adds significant depth to the firm's environmental and litigation capabilities.



RYAN HIETE joins Stone | Dean LLP as Partner with more than 25 years of experience counseling clients on complex environmental, land-use, regulatory, compliance, and business litigation matters. Known for his strategic, results-driven approach, Ryan advises businesses, developers, and public agencies across California on navigating intricate environmental challenges, regulatory risk, and high-stakes disputes.



KORI MACKSOUD – With nearly a decade of litigation experience, Kori represents corporate clients in complex personal injury, premises liability, and general liability matters. Known for disciplined preparation and sharp legal analysis, she manages high exposure cases with a strategic, business minded approach. She prepares each matter with the expectation it may ultimately be tried before a jury. Congratulations Kori!



TALITHA GALSTYAN joined Stone | Dean LLP in 2022 as an Associate Attorney. Through her leadership, strategic approach, and dedication to clients, Talitha has built a practice defending high exposure civil litigation matters across California. Talitha has played a key role in preparing civil cases for trial, assisting in multiple trials, and helping lead litigation strategies that drive successful outcomes for clients across California. We're so proud to announce her promotion to Partner.

NEW ATTORNEYS



ANDREA ANZ is a Senior Associate at Stone | Dean whose practice focuses on civil litigation, including general liability, premises liability, landlord-tenant and habitability disputes, insurance defense, and professional liability. With decades of combined litigation and insurance industry experience, she brings a strategic, practical approach to managing matters from inception through resolution. Her background includes work at several respected California law firms as well as prior claims experience with Farmers Insurance, providing valuable insight into liability and coverage issues.



TALLIE BENTOVIM is an Associate Attorney at Stone | Dean with more than two decades of civil litigation experience across the United States, Israel, and the United Kingdom. Her practice focuses on negligence, premises liability, employment, administrative, and contract-related disputes, and she brings extensive experience in pleadings, discovery, depositions, mediations, and trial work. Her international background and strong analytical skills provide valuable perspective across a wide range of complex matters.



MAINAK D'ATTARAY is of counsel with Stone | Dean with extensive experience in complex civil litigation, including business and real estate disputes, personal injury, employment, habitability, insurance defense, and commercial litigation. He has represented both plaintiffs and defendants in state and federal courts and brings significant experience managing matters from inception through trial. His broad litigation background and strategic approach make him a valuable advocate across a wide range of complex matters.



MAURINA SHERMAN is an Associate Attorney at Stone | Dean whose practice focuses on insurance defense and general civil litigation, including insurance coverage, personal injury, and premises liability matters. A former journalist and science writer, she brings exceptional research, writing, and analytical skills to her legal practice. Maurina graduated first in her law school class and has experience supporting matters at both the trial and appellate levels.



SEVAK "SAM" TATEVOSYAN is an Associate Attorney at Stone | Dean whose practice focuses on civil litigation, including workers' compensation, insurance defense, premises liability, and personal injury matters. Prior to joining the firm, he represented retailers and insurers in workers' compensation and personal injury cases and gained valuable public sector experience with the Conviction Integrity Unit at the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.



JOHN TULLIS is a Senior Associate at Stone | Dean with more than 15 years of litigation experience representing both plaintiffs and defendants throughout California. His practice spans business litigation, premises liability, construction defect, elder abuse, personal injury, wrongful death, and other complex civil matters. He also brings significant appellate experience, having successfully handled appeals in California state and federal courts, including the California Supreme Court and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.



Sometimes You Don't Know How Hurt You Are Until You See Your Lawyer: Beware the Billboard Lawyers!

by Gregory E. Stone, Founding Partner

Often—though not always—personal injury lawyers and the doctors they refer clients to become very wealthy, while the injured client ends up with screws and plates in their spine. In my view, there is a significant subset of attorneys and doctors who are unscrupulous, driven by profit, and indifferent to their clients' or patients' best interests. For them, it is about one thing: their bottom line.

I have practiced law for over 37 years and have tried more than 100 personal injury and civil rights jury trials to verdict, primarily on the defense side. Over those decades, I have witnessed dramatic changes in personal injury practice. Unfortunately, I believe a subgroup of lawyers and doctors now engage in conduct that is, at best, unethical—and at worst, potentially criminal.

Let me be clear: I do not take issue with personal injury law itself. I handle contingency cases and believe the system serves an important purpose. My criticism is directed only at those who exploit both the system and the very people they are supposed to help.

Many personal injury lawyers are competent, ethical, and compassionate. This article is not about them. It is about those who are not—and, unfortunately, their numbers appear to be growing.

The Scheme

Here is how the scheme often works.

An attorney refers you to a doctor they regularly use, assuring you that the doctor is “the best” and that you “deserve the best.” You are told not to worry about costs because the doctor will treat you on a lien.

If you have health insurance and are told not to use it, that is a major red flag. You should seriously consider walking away.

A medical lien is a contract among you, your lawyer, and the doctor stating that the doctor will be paid out of any settlement or verdict. Critically, however, the lien typically makes you—not your lawyer—ultimately responsible for the bills. If your case is unsuccessful, you may still owe hundreds of thousands of dollars and by then it will be too late to run it through insurance.

Defense experts often conclude major procedures—especially spine surgeries—were not medically necessary and any doctor performing these procedures on a lien basis have a conflict of interest.¹

Meanwhile, lien-based charges can be many times higher than what insurance would pay (about 10 times as much), so the lien doctors prefer a share of your lawsuit over standard insurance reimbursement. This benefits the doctor, not the patient.

¹ American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons provides: An orthopedic surgeon who provides oral or written medical testimony or expert medical opinions shall not agree to or accept a fee that is contingent upon the outcome of a matter.

In many cases, these same doctors have financial interests in the surgical centers where the procedures are performed, further increasing their profits—often at your expense.

Ask yourself a simple question:

Could you afford \$200,000, \$300,000, or even \$1,000,000 in medical bills if you lose your case?

Defense attorneys repeatedly see the same small group of plaintiff doctors recommending major, life-altering procedures such as:

- Spinal fusions
- Cervical stimulators
- Lumbar stimulators
- Back or neck surgeries

Medical literature suggests that spinal fusions often lead to additional surgeries at adjacent levels within 10 to 15 years.

Will your lien doctor be there then?

Your case will be long over, and your settlement funds may already be gone.

Who Really Benefits from the Settlement?

By way of example, consider a \$500,000 settlement. “My lawyer got me \$500,000”!

But what does the client receive? Below are typical breakdowns with a doctor on a lien versus using insurance.

Typical lien scenario:

- Settlement: \$500,000
- Attorney's fee (40%): \$200,000
- Litigation costs: \$50,000
- Remaining: \$250,000
- Medical bills: \$200,000
- **Client receives: \$50,000**

In this scenario, the lawyer receives \$200,000, the doctor receives \$200,000, and the client receives \$50,000—often after undergoing invasive procedures which will undoubtedly require future care/revisions.

And that \$200,000 may not include all providers—radiologists, chiropractors, and pain specialists are often involved as well.

It is also important to understand that the attorney's fee is typically calculated on the entire settlement, including amounts paid to medical providers. That means a significant portion of the fee is effectively tied to medical charges. So basically, your lawyer gets \$80,000, on just your overpriced medical bills alone.

Now compare the same case using health insurance:

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CASE IN FOCUS – LAW SCHOOL CLASSMATES RECONNECT TO SECURE ALASKA FISHING LODGE \$650,000.00 SETTLEMENT

by Gregg S. Garfinkel, Partner

For 37 years, Steve and Leanne Smith built something rare — a world-renowned sport-fishing operation in the waters of Homer, Alaska. Captain Steve's Fishing Lodge was more than a business. It was a family legacy, a community institution, and the product of decades of hard-earned expertise on some of the most demanding waters in the world. When the opportunity arose to expand their fleet with a larger vessel, the Wild Banshee, the Smiths believed the future was finally within reach.

They could not have anticipated what came next. The contractors they trusted — Eric Sloth and Homer Marine, LLC — were the original builders of the Wild Banshee and seemed like the natural choice to oversee its retrofit. What followed was a devastating course of incompetence, concealment, and betrayal that would bring the Smiths to the brink of financial ruin.

They had all their eggs in one basket — and the defendants knew it. When Homer Marine walked away from the wreckage they had created, our clients were left with an inoperable vessel, a shattered fleet, and more than a million dollars in losses.

After paying Homer Marine for a comprehensive retrofit — including hull repairs, new engines, safety systems, and Coast Guard compliance work — the Smiths received a vessel that was dangerously unfit for sea. What they did not know was that during the repair process, Homer Marine had dropped the Wild Banshee's motor approximately six feet, causing catastrophic damage to the oil pan and internal components. Sloth concealed this fact entirely.

When the Wild Banshee was launched in June 2023, problems emerged immediately. By July 30, 2023, the vessel suffered a catastrophic engine failure while carrying passengers and crew on a charter — with only 70 hours of use on the damaged, concealed motor. The concealment of that damage could have cost lives. When the Smiths sought further repairs, Homer Marine refused to perform any additional work, walking away from the destruction they had caused.

To fund the ever-growing repair bills, the Smiths had already been forced to liquidate personal and business assets — including The Reaper, a third charter boat in their fleet, which they sold in advance of the 2024 season. The defendants were fully aware of this vulnerability and exploited it. With no vessel operational and no recourse from the contractor, the Smiths faced additional, and significant, economic losses.

That's when Captain Steve's legal team stepped in. Stone | Dean Partner, Gregg S. Garfinkel of Stone | Dean LLP and his McGeorge School of Law classmate, Nora G. Barlow of Barlow Anderson, LLC, of Anchorage, Alaska, assembled a comprehensive evidentiary record — receipts, cancelled checks, bank records, inspection reports, and expert testimony — that documented the full scope of the Smiths' losses and the defendants' misconduct.

The legal claims were substantial: breach of contract, breach of the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing, fraud, and violations of Alaska's Unfair Trade Practices Act (AS 45.50.471). That statute, critically, provides for treble damages, full attorney's fees, and other extraordinary relief — reflecting the legislature's recognition that deceptive business conduct deserves more than compensatory redress alone. The active concealment of the dropped motor, which put passenger lives at risk, further supported a claim for punitive damages.

The matter was submitted to mediation before the Honorable Dana Fabe on October 14, 2025. The Smiths approached the process in good faith

— voluntarily providing documents, sitting for interviews, and entering prepared to resolve the matter rather than prolong the litigation. Their goal, stated plainly, was not merely a financial recovery. It was to put this chapter behind them and get back on the water.

Gregg and Nora successfully resolved at mediation, securing a settlement for Captain Steve's in the amount of \$650,000.00. The Smiths' goal was simple: to stop fighting in courtrooms and get back to fishing. We are proud to have helped them reach that moment.

Stone | Dean LLP and Barlow Anderson, LLC (Alaska) are proud to have stood alongside Steve and Leanne Smith. We hope that the resolution of this case gives the Captain Steve's Fishing Lodge the foundation it needs to rebuild, expand, and continue its proud tradition on the waters of Homer, Alaska.



EXCITING EXPANSION: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Many of the firm's clients face increasing environmental scrutiny in their day-to-day operations. With Groveman | Hiete's group on board, clients gain access to seasoned counsel who can conduct audits, draft policies, train staff, and position businesses to stay ahead of evolving regulations, helping to prevent costly violations before they occur.

Finally, this expansion strengthens Stone | Dean's ability to serve clients with operations across California and beyond. The environmental team's deep familiarity with California's regulatory environment—combined with the firm's existing statewide litigation presence—creates a powerful resource for businesses navigating multi-jurisdictional challenges.

At its core, this integration reflects a shared commitment to exceptional client service: solving immediate problems while supporting long-term goals in a pragmatic, approachable, and cost-efficient manner. Clients can expect the same dedication to clear communication, strategic thinking, and results-oriented advocacy that has defined both Groveman | Hiete LLP and Stone | Dean LLP.

We are excited about the opportunities this brings and look forward to partnering even more closely with our valued clients as their needs evolve in an increasingly complex regulatory world. For more information about how the expanded environmental practice can support your business, please contact the firm at (818) 999-2232 or visit stonedeanlaw.com.

Welcome to the next chapter—stronger together at Stone | Dean LLP.

Stone | Dean Celebrations and Fun

October 31st, 2025

Halloween Celebration

This past year's Halloween celebration brought out the best in the firm, and not just in costume form. Attorneys and staff competed in a costume contest, tested their baking skills in a Halloween dessert contest, and showed off their carving talents in a pumpkin carving competition. It was a fun afternoon that gave the whole team a chance to step away from their desks and celebrate together.



November 7th, 2025

Love Your Lawyer Day

On Love Your Lawyer Day, the firm took a moment to do exactly that. We treated our attorneys to a luncheon, and took the opportunity to recognize everything they bring to the firm each day. It was a small gesture for the work they put in, and a reminder that their efforts don't go unnoticed.



November 11th, 2025

Thanksgiving Potluck

The firm's annual Thanksgiving potluck lived up to its tradition this year. Everyone contributed with dishes to share, and the spread reflected just how much effort the team put in. We gathered in a beautiful venue with a stunning view- the perfect backdrop for good food and even better company.



December 19th, 2025

Holiday Party

This past year's holiday party was one to remember. The firm celebrated the season at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, where the food spoke for itself and the atmosphere matched the occasion. The night included a photo booth that kept everyone entertained, a lively white elephant exchange, and plenty of time to simply enjoy each other's company outside of the office. It was a chance to reflect on everything the team accomplished and head into the new year on a high note.



February 13th, 2026

Valentine's Day in the Office

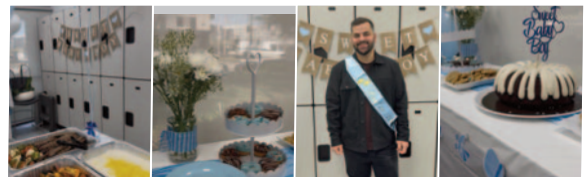
The firm made sure Valentine's Day didn't go unnoticed. The morning kicked off with a coffee cart serving up Valentine's Day themed drinks, a fun way to start the day before diving into work. The festivities continued with delicious food that kept the good energy going. It was a sweet reminder that even in the middle of a busy week, there's always time to celebrate a little!



March 11th, 2026

Liron's Baby Shower

The firm came together to celebrate one of our own as Liron prepared to welcome a baby boy. It was a warm and joyful afternoon filled with love and excitement for this next chapter in his life. We are so thrilled for Liron and cannot wait to meet the newest addition to his family!



March 17th, 2026

St. Patrick's Day

The firm celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a festive lunch that leaned fully into the holiday. Corned beef sandwiches set the tone, and green desserts made sure no one forgot what day it was. A fun midweek break that brought a little luck of the Irish to the office.



April 22nd, 2026

Administrative Professionals Day

When it comes to Administrative Professionals Day, this firm does not hold back, and this year was no exception. The day started with coffee and crepes, setting the tone for what turned into a full day of well-deserved pampering. Our admin team enjoyed massages, facials, and gift bags, and wrapped things up with tacos for lunch. It was a small reflection of how much they are valued here. The firm runs because of them, and days like this are just one way we make sure they know it.



Beware the Billboard Lawyers! (Continued from Page 4)

Insurance-based scenario:

- Settlement: \$500,000
- Attorney's fee (40%): \$200,000
- Litigation costs: \$50,000
- Remaining: \$250,000
- Medical bills (negotiated/insured): \$20,000
- **Client receives: \$230,000.**

The difference is staggering.

The doctor benefits because his/her bills are often 10 times the insurance reimbursement rate. So, even if the doctor collects on 5 out of 10 cases he/she is still way ahead.

The lawyer benefits because there is a doctor involved who will no doubt argue the surgery is related to the accident to ensure he gets paid

Conduct That Crosses the Line

In certain cases, attorneys deduct their full fees and costs, then deposit the remaining funds with the court through an interpleader action—leaving the client to negotiate medical reductions alone,

That is unacceptable.

A Real Example

I am currently handling a case involving a large grocery store chain.

A healthy 50-year-old woman slipped on water, got up, and walked out of the store. Shortly thereafter, she retained counsel and was referred to a lien doctor. A doctor the law firm refers out regularly.

She is now being treated for a cascade of spinal conditions, with recommendations including:

- Multiple spinal injections
- Lumbar stimulator trial

- Lumbar discectomy
- Lumbar fusion
- Future fusion in 10–15 years
- Two cervical spine surgeries
- Cervical stimulator

The projected medical costs exceed \$1 million. All treatment directed by the attorney. 2 spine surgeries; spinal stimulator, and patient still in pain with future recommendations. The settlement demand is \$3,000,000.

The Fee Agreement

Most contingency fee agreements range from 40% to 50%. While contingency fees are not inherently unethical, clients should review these agreements carefully.

Key considerations:

- Do not agree to fees exceeding 40%
- Avoid administrative or “office” fees
- Consider requiring that the attorney's fee not exceed your net recovery (absent extraordinary circumstances)
- Ensure medical liens are negotiated before payment

If a lawyer resists reasonable client protections, that should raise concern.

Final Thoughts

Again, the issue is not the system itself. Legitimate injury victims deserve compensation, and contingency fees can provide access to justice.

But the system can be abused. Most personal injury lawyers are ethical professionals who care deeply about their clients.

Before hiring a lawyer, ask questions. Read the fee agreement carefully. And remember:

Sometimes you don't know how hurt you are until you see your lawyer.

**INJURED IN A
CAR ACCIDENT?
YOU WIN.**

BEWARE

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NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

→ In January, Gregg S. Garfinkel served as a judge for the University of California, Irvine School of Law Moot Court Competition. Gregg was impressed with the high caliber of oral advocacy demonstrated by these future lawyers as they addressed a complicated area of Constitutional Law.

→ In May, Elnoz Faiazi successfully asked the court to deem a plaintiff a vexatious litigant in a case she was defending. A "vexatious litigant" is an individual who repeatedly files meritless, frivolous, or harassing lawsuits and legal motions. The designation is designed to prevent the abuse of the court system.

→ In March, Kristi Dean and Leslie Blozan won a motion for summary judgment against a plaintiff who fell down some stairs at a local mall. The court found there was no triable issue of fact and ruled in favor of the firm's client.

→ In February, Gregg S. Garfinkel obtained an outright dismissal of a federal court matter based upon the Carmack Amendment to the Interstate Commerce Act (49 U.S.C. 14706). The Court premised its ruling on two 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decisions that were obtained by Mr. Garfinkel earlier in his legal career.

→ In January, Kristi Dean attended the annual meeting for California Insurance Wholesalers Association where she conducted a mock trial event for the attendees in Palm Desert California. In February, Kristi Dean conducted another mock trial event in Miami Florida for a large gathering of insurance brokers affiliated with Mission Underwriters Managers. The mock trial events enable the attendees to experience an abbreviated jury trial where they participate as witnesses, jurors and attorneys.

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