

FALL 2025

atissue

A **STONE** | **DEAN** PUBLICATION

*Connecting you to trending and relevant
legal developments in California*

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A Word from the Partners

2025 has been another fantastic year for Stone | Dean. We celebrated our anniversary at Terranea where our amazing group of employees brought their significant others for a wonderful weekend of food, wine and outdoor fun. This year we have had an amazing record of successes in trial, settlements and summary judgment motions. We have continued to expand our practice groups and number of employees and we had the privilege of adding to our

wonderful group of clients. In this edition we introduce you to some of our new members as you gear up for the beginning of the holiday season. We also engage in a little braggadocio, especially about the successes we have had at trial! We hope you enjoy this fall's edition of At Issue!

Kristi Dean
Managing Partner

Stone | Dean's 2025 RAVE Award Honors Andra Rivera and Annette Mendez!

Each year, this award is presented to team members who exemplify excellence in their work, compassion toward colleagues, and an unwavering commitment to our clients. The RAVE Award celebrates those who not only demonstrate exceptional skill and professionalism, but who also embody the spirit of teamwork, dedication, and integrity that make Stone | Dean who we are. This year, we are proud to honor Andra Rivera, subpoena czar, and Annette Mendez, paralegal. Both Andra and Annette consistently go above and beyond in their roles, earning the admiration of their colleagues and the gratitude of our clients. Their commitment, expertise, and positive energy have made a lasting impact on our firm, and we are delighted to celebrate their achievements. Each recipient received "rave" reviews from their peers:

ANDRA RIVERA is responsible for issuing and reviewing subpoenas for necessary records in preparation for discovery, depositions, trials, and more. With meticulous attention to detail and a commitment to efficiency, Andra maintains accurate and organized records within our internal system, supporting our attorneys.

Peer Praise for Andra:

"Since Andra started at Stone | Dean, she has grown into such an incredible and inspiring individual, both professionally and personally."

"She consistently goes above and beyond in her role, whether it's helping a colleague with a challenging task or simply being a steady and calming presence."

"She is always willing to help others, has great communication skills, and is dependable."

"Her growth and contributions have not only strengthened our team but also made Stone | Dean a better place to work."



ANNETTE MENDEZ is a certified paralegal and has been handling litigation matters for eight years. She was the first in her family to go to college and graduated with a double major in history and politics from the University of California in Santa Cruz. She excels at litigation filings, document preparation and client relations.

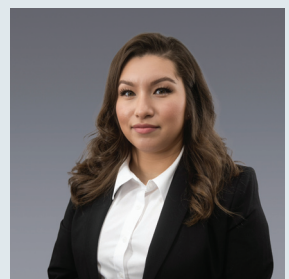
Peer Praise for Annette:

"Annette frequently identifies workflow gaps and takes the initiative to create checklists or training guides to help the team."

"She is has integrity, good communication skills and adaptability."

"Annette volunteers for new tasks, proposing solutions and improvements that benefit her team and the firm."

"I've seen her work firsthand, and it's always high quality. What she produces is truly valuable."



The firm is truly fortunate to have such dedicated employees as Andra and Annette.

Welcome Aboard!



ALEENA AHMAD is an associate attorney who brings her four years of civil litigation experience to the firm. Prior to joining the firm, Aleena advised private-sector employers in a wide range of labor and employment matters, represented public and private entities in premises liability cases, and defended architects and engineers in professional liability claims. This diverse background gives her unique insight into solving complex legal challenges. Aleena earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Arizona and her Juris Doctorate from Southwestern Law School, graduating with a distinction in public service. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, traveling, and reading.



LIRON COHEN brings his legal experience to the team at Stone | Dean, where he focuses on personal injury defense. Prior to joining the firm, Liron honed his legal skills in premises liability, habitability, and personal injury. His experience working on both defense and plaintiff cases has allowed him to develop a well-rounded experience better enabling him to navigate and solve complex legal issues. Liron earned his Juris Doctorate from Southwestern Law School in 2023 and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from University of California, Los Angeles. In his spare time, Liron enjoys traveling and the outdoors.



JULIAN HOUGH has been practicing law since 2021 and specializes in entertainment and labor and employment law. Before joining Stone | Dean, Julian worked for the Screen Actors Guild, supporting producers, union members, and theatrical productions efforts to adhere to the guild's collective bargaining agreements. As a litigator for The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Julian has advocated on behalf of working-class union members in a variety of claims: wage and hour, discrimination, harassment, unfair labor practices, and wrongful termination. These experiences have given Julian a unique perspective on both creative and labor-focused legal issues. Julian is dedicated to delivering effective and pragmatic legal solutions for his clients. Outside of his legal practice, Julian is an avid board gamer, amateur sou chef and passionate film buff.



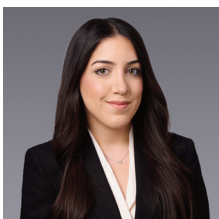
MARGARET A. KLUG, a senior associate at Stone Dean, has more than thirty years experience in civil litigation. She has handled a wide variety of cases, including wrongful death, catastrophic injuries, trucking, premises liability, products liability, landlord/tenant habitability, construction defect, and plaintiff personal injury cases. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude*, in English from Pepperdine University, and her Juris Doctorate degree from Loyola Law School. Margaret is a California native. She loves the outdoors, gardening, antiques, classic cars, and is involved with animal rescue.



CATHERINE "CAT" SOMMER, senior associate, serves in the commercial disputes; business transactions; insurance defense; and general litigation practice areas of Stone | Dean. Cat is an attorney with more than two decades of both law firm and non-legal public service experience. She is admitted in both New York and California and has long legal record of success in employment law; family law (divorce, domestic violence); Lanterman Act/disability rights fair hearings; commercial litigation; securities litigation; lemon law; product liability; international contract disputes; insurance defense; and FINRA arbitrations. Her non-legal experience includes coordinating homeless services and domestic violence resources within Los Angeles County. Cat's trauma-informed care and mediation training make her uniquely skilled at compassionate, non-contentious conflict resolution. In her spare time, she is a regular cast member of a cutting-edge therapy documentary, currently in development.



MEGHAN TURNER is a senior associate at Stone | Dean who has been in the practice of law since December 2012. She has handled a wide range of litigation involving wrongful foreclosure, construction, premise liability, products liability, personal injury and real estate disputes. Prior to coming to Stone | Dean, Meghan was associate general counsel for a large vertically integrated network of companies specializing in real estate and had great success litigating in the state, federal, bankruptcy and probate courts. Meghan earned her Bachelor of Science degree from California State University, Dominguez Hills and her Juris Doctorate, *cum laude*, from Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Houston, Texas. When not practicing law, Meghan enjoys attending sporting events with her family, reading, and eating lots of delicious food.



MELINE YEDIGARYAN is an associate attorney at Stone | Dean, focusing on civil litigation and personal injury. Admitted to the California State Bar in 2024, she previously gained experience at Los Angeles law firms, assisting with litigation and trial preparation in personal injury matters including motor vehicle accidents, product and premises liability, slip and falls, and dog bites. Meline earned her Juris Doctorate from Southwestern Law School in 2023, where she served as President of the Armenian Law Students Association and as a Dean's Fellow. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with loved ones, working out, running, and traveling.



Premises Liability in California: What Owners and Tenants Need to Know

by Kori Macksound, Senior Associate

California imposes a general duty to use reasonable care to avoid harming others. That duty applies to how property is managed and maintained, not to controlling people. If you have reason to anticipate a hazard and a chance to fix it or warn about it, you must act reasonably under the circumstances. Premises liability is simply negligence applied to land: the obligation generally follows possession or control of the property. When injuries happen on commercial property in California, liability usually turns on who controlled the premises and whether reasonable steps were taken to prevent foreseeable harm.

A. Tenant vs. Landlord: Control Drives Duty

Tenants are frequently named when incidents occur in parking lots and other common areas, yet a tenant's duty generally tracks ownership, possession, or actual control. Where the landlord owns and maintains the common areas and the tenant has not assumed control, the tenant's exposure should be limited. Control alone can establish duty even without title, and the touchstones are dominion acts such as directing maintenance, making repairs, changing surfaces or traffic patterns, posting and enforcing rules, or excluding others. By contrast, the mere fact that customers pass through, employees walk across, corporate policies exist, or staff render aid after an incident do not convert a landlord's lot into the tenant's legal responsibility.

B. Practices That Protect You

In daily operations, store personnel should promptly report—rather than attempt to repair—any hazards located in common areas controlled by the landlord. Staff should be trained to assist injured individuals while refraining from any speculation regarding fault. It is also essential to maintain and preserve all relevant documentation, including the lease, site plan, vendor contracts, inspection logs, and any notices provided to property management.

C. Lease Language to Lock In

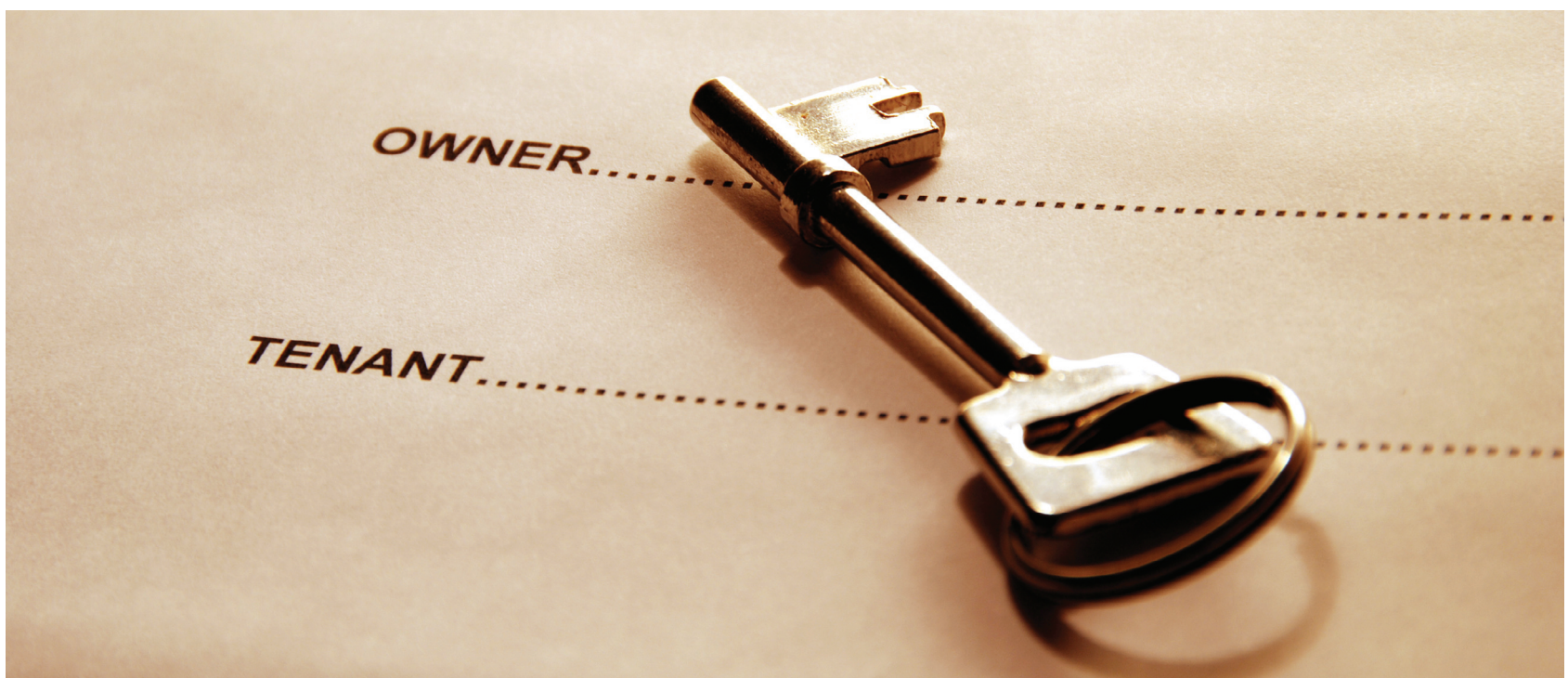
Well-drafted agreements align risk with control. Strong leases clearly define the demised premises to exclude parking lots and other common areas; assign the landlord sole responsibility for inspection, maintenance, repair, lighting, sweeping, resurfacing, and signage in those areas; and confirm that the tenant has no right or obligation to patrol, alter, or maintain common areas, nor to obstruct or exercise control over them. Such agreements also establish a clear incident protocol under which the tenant promptly notifies the landlord of any hazards, and the landlord undertakes the necessary repairs.

D. Common Pitfalls (Avoid These “Looks Like Control” Moves)

- ✓ Repainting stripes or adding cones and speed bumps in the common lot
- ✓ Posting your own parking or traffic rules in common areas
- ✓ Hiring contractors to “help out” beyond your space
- ✓ Allowing pallets, carts, queues, or displays to spill into drive lanes

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In California premises liability law, duty follows control, meaning tenants generally owe no duty in landlord-maintained common areas unless they exercise dominion over them. Reasonable, well-documented inspections are often decisive in establishing or refuting notice. Control is specific and is demonstrated by acts such as directing maintenance, altering surfaces, or enforcing rules. While the elements of a premises liability claim remain straightforward, they are strictly applied under California's general duty framework.





Top Reasons Why Every California Employer, Regardless of Size, Needs an Updated Employee Handbook

by Jennifer M. Burman, Senior Associate

Although the law does not require employers to provide a written handbook we strongly recommend it and recommend doing so and updating it regularly. A well-drafted and timely updated handbook may serve as the first line of defense in any lawsuit or regulatory action brought against the company. A written handbook provides many other benefits, including: keeping managers, supervisors, and employees current on applicable laws and regulations; updating managers, supervisors, and employees on company policies and procedures; and streamlining the process for onboarding new employees.

First, the handbook functions to document compliance by the company with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and may shield the company from liability for non-compliance with applicable law. It might also reduce any damages, penalties, or fines imposed on the company. For example, if a former employee brings an action claiming that he or she was terminated in violation of a contract for employment between the company and the employee, a provision in the handbook stating that all employment is at-will may serve as a defense to that claim.

An effective handbook serves to keep managers, supervisors, and employees up to date on the complexity of laws and regulations that apply to the company and to their respective positions. Although a handbook itself is not legally required, both federal and California law do require certain employment policies, such as policies prohibiting harassment, discrimination, and retaliation, be in writing and provided to all employees. California has some of the most extensive and frequently updated employment laws and regulations in the nation. A current handbook can help the company to avoid lawsuits, investigations by federal, state, or local agencies, and the imposition penalties and fines.

Second, a well-drafted employee handbook educates and updates managers, supervisors, and employees on policies adopted by the company. Both United States and California law permit companies to set their own policies and procedures unilaterally, and to amend or terminate those policies and procedures, generally without notice, so long as these policies and procedures comply with applicable law. Preventing misunderstandings of these rights and responsibilities may help avoid lawsuits and other legal and regulatory actions that often result from such issues.

We also advise clients to include in their handbook all optional policies that apply to their specific workplace and include the consequences for any employee who violates the policy. Such disciplinary policies, however, should provide the flexibility needed to enable the company to take action based on the facts and circumstances of the specific case.

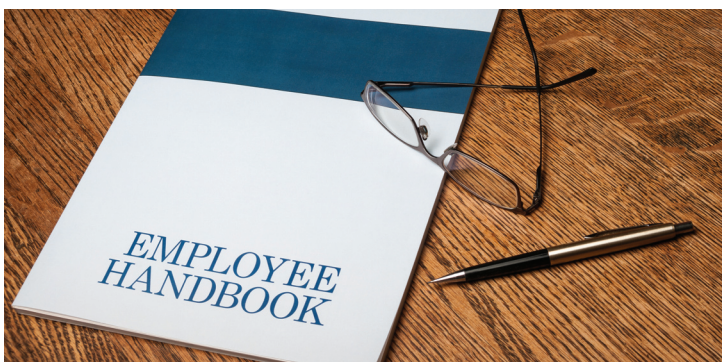
The inclusion in an employee handbook of all required and optional policies that apply to the business helps to ensure these policies are applied equally and consistently to all employees of the organization. This inclusion further ensures all employees are treated fairly and equally. A well-maintained employee handbook that is applied and enforced consistently should help to shield the employer from claims of discrimination.

Third, a thoughtful employee handbook assists the company in the onboarding and training of new employees. An inclusive handbook offers to new employees insight into the values, culture, and rules of the company. This guidance helps new employees acclimate to the workplace and become productive more quickly.

Finally, we highly recommend to all of our clients who are creating or updating an employee handbook to keep in mind the following best practices:

1. An employee handbook is a legal document that must be prepared and updated carefully. An employer must understand its current policies and procedures and what is working well and what needs improvement. We further advise that an employer consider its future needs when drafting and updating the handbook.
2. An employee handbook should be prepared using plain language. Clarity reduces employee misunderstandings and promotes compliance with policies and procedures.
3. The handbook should be translated into the languages which are needed to accommodate non English speaking employees, to ensure all employees understand their rights and responsibilities while helping the company avoid claims of discrimination.
4. The handbook should include a provision that said handbook does not constitute a contract for employment. It should clearly state employment remains at-will and can be terminated by either the employer or the employee at any time, with or without cause. The balance of the handbook must be carefully drafted so those policies and procedures do not, in effect, override the at-will policy and subject the employer to legal action for breach of employment contract.
5. The employee handbook must be updated regularly. We recommend the handbook be updated at least annually, and/or when applicable laws or regulations have changed, and whenever the company changes its internal policies and procedures.
6. Most importantly, the employer must practice what it preaches and carry out the policies and procedures contained in the handbook, and must do so consistently. Otherwise, the company risks claims that its policies and procedures are enforced in a discriminatory or unfair manner, or that they are not enforceable as internal policies.
6. Crucially, while a current written employee handbook provides the benefits described herein, the employer must also implement the policies and procedures it contains, and must do so consistently. Otherwise, the company risks claims that its policies and procedures are enforced in a discriminatory or unfair manner, or that they are legally not enforceable.

For all of the above reasons, we urge all of our clients who engage employees, to prepare or update their employee handbook. The handbook should help to keep your workplace free from disputes, on track, and productive. We at Stone | Dean, L.L.P. have extensive experience in drafting and keeping current handbooks for a wide variety of businesses and industries. Please reach out to us and we will be glad to get the process started.



We're Pretty Darn Good



Greg Stone, with the help of others and within a span of about 5 months, had a Four-Peat!! All four cases, despite significant settlement offers, resulted in a \$0 award.

Greg and all four verdicts were profiled in the *Los Angeles Daily Journal*." This Week's Top *Verdicts & Settlements* edition. Here is a redacted brief version:

Faith Lopez v Ralphs Grocery Company

Case No.: 56-2021-00551488-CU-PO-VT
Ventura-Judge Mark Borello

Greg with the assistant of SD paralegal Alex Kiek, tried this case to a jury. It involved a slip and fall in the grocery store in Ventura on a refrigeration unit base plate which became dislodged. Plaintiff alleged defendant was negligent for not securing the plate allowing it to become easily dislodged. Defendant did not dispute plaintiff fell-the fall was captured on video. Defendant argued it was reasonable in the use and maintenance of its premises. Plaintiff alleged bilateral knee replacements resulted from the fall and had two medical experts and on liability expert and asked the jury for over \$1,000,000. Defense had one medical expert. **The jury agreed with Greg and reached its verdict on 12-6-24, awarding plaintiff \$0.**

Arutyun Karapetyan v Alberstons

Case No.: 22STCV06348
Judge Holly Hancock, Inglewood Superior Court

Greg with the assistance of SD associate attorney, Talitha Galstyan tried this case to a jury. The case involved a big rig tractor trailer rear-ending plaintiff while plaintiff was stopped at a traffic light. The incident was captured on the trucks dash cam. Defendant admitted liability. Plaintiff a former professional soccer player for the LA Galaxy rejected defendant's six figure offer to settle. Plaintiff alleged significant injuries including the need for a spinal fusion and asked the jury to award him over \$3,000,000. **The jury agreed with Greg and Talitha and returned its verdict on 1-24-25, awarding plaintiff \$0, despite the defense admitting liability. Plaintiff ultimately paid defendants costs of suit.**

Liza Porras v. Ralphs Grocery Company

Case No.: 22CHCV00906
Judge Melvin Sandvig

Greg tried this case in Chatsworth. It involved a slip and fall on produce. Plaintiff alleged defendant was negligent for not cleaning up the hazard before the fall. Defendant did not dispute the fall as it was captured on video but argued it was reasonable in the use and maintenance of its premises. Plaintiff turned down defendant's \$350,000 settlement offer and opted for a trial by jury asking the jury for over \$3,000,000, which included a neck fusion and several other surgeries alleged to be caused by the fall. Plaintiff had a liability expert, and several medical experts testify. Defendant had one expert, a medical expert. **The jury agreed with Greg and on 2-5-25 returned its verdict and awarded plaintiff \$0.**

Allen Hernandez v. Ralphs Grocery Company

Case No.: 56-2022-00565810
Judge Carla J. Ortega

Greg, with the assistance of SD paralegal Leandra Huerta, tried this case in Ventura. On May 8, 2021, plaintiff Allen Hernandez was shopping with his two nieces at a Ralphs grocery store in Simi Valley when he alleges he slipped and fell on a puddle of water emanating from a defective refrigeration unit. As a result, he sustained catastrophic injuries. Plaintiff suffered injuries to neck, back (with several injections), torn meniscus with surgery and Achilles (partial tear) The defendant store erroneously did not retain any evidence or video despite having

an operating video system. The accident occurred during the second phase of COVID. Ralphs argued it was reasonable in the use and maintenance of the premises. Plaintiff turned down a six-figure settlement offer and instead opted for a jury trial asking the jury to award him \$2,850,000. **After a 7 day jury trial the jury returned its unanimous 12-0 verdict in 17 minutes!! Awarding Plaintiff \$0.**

Victory for Vons in Premises Liability Case

We are pleased to report a significant win on behalf of our client, The Vons Companies, Inc. In *Elias v. The Vons Companies, Inc.* (Case No. 23NWC02529), the Court granted our motion for summary judgment, dismissing Plaintiff's premises liability claim in its entirety. The Court found that Plaintiff failed to raise a triable issue of fact regarding the existence of a dangerous condition or notice thereof, and rejected her expert's speculative testimony. This outcome was achieved through the dedicated work of our team, including associate attorney Talitha Galstyan, whose efforts were instrumental in securing this result.

Defense Win: Vons Secures Summary Judgment in Parking Lot Slip-and-Fall Case

In a recent Los Angeles County Superior Court decision, The Vons Companies, Inc. prevailed on summary judgment in a premises liability lawsuit stemming from a September 2023 slip-and-fall outside its Reseda store. The plaintiff claimed that she suffered serious injuries, including a fractured kneecap, after slipping on a spilled substance in the store's crosswalk while carrying her young child. The lawsuit asserted negligence, premises liability, negligent hiring, and punitive damages. The Court sided with Vons, finding that it had no legal duty to maintain or control the parking lot where the incident occurred. According to the store's lease, the parking area was excluded from Vons' premises and remained the property owner's responsibility for inspection, maintenance, and repair. Plaintiffs argued that Vons exercised "de facto" control over the area based on employee activity and internal safety policies, pointing to deposition testimony and training documents. The Court disagreed, holding that occasional use of the lot and assistance provided after the incident did not meet the legal threshold for control under California premises liability law. With no triable issue of fact on the duty element, the Court entered judgment for Vons on all claims, including the request for punitive damages.

Greg Stone gains victory, jury returning a 9-3 defense verdict!

On February 27th, 2021, plaintiff slipped but did not fall at Ralphs, claiming severe back and neck pain which led to her filing a premises liability/negligence suit against Ralphs. Plaintiff obtained extensive medical treatment, including injections, bilateral wrist surgery, and anterior cervical fusion discectomy, incurring over \$100,000 in medical specials. Plaintiff's counsel denied Ralphs' six-figure settlement offer and associated in trial counsel to try the case; setting Plaintiff up as the first female UFC boxing coach. Trial commenced on January 27th, 2025. At trial, Plaintiff asked the jury for \$2.4 Million. After 45 minutes, the Jury returned a 9-3 defense verdict, finding Ralphs was not negligent in the use and maintenance of its premises.

Motions for Summary Judgement Granted

Attorney Kori Macksoud secured summary judgement for Vons in a personal injury case. Plaintiff Mary Ann Tomayo claimed she suffered a patella fracture after slipping in a parking lot adjacent to a Vons while carrying her child. The suit alleged negligence, premises liability, negligent hiring, and punitive damages. The Court found that Vons owed no duty of care, as it neither owned nor controlled the parking lot. Based on the lease agreement, the area was excluded from Vons' premises, with maintenance obligations falling to the property owner. The Court also rejected claims of de facto control by Vons employees, finding no triable issue of material fact. All claims against Vons were dismissed.

A Year of Stone | Dean Celebrations and Fun

January 28, 2025

Alison's Baby Shower

We kicked off the year with a nice surprise for our Paralegal, Alison Starr, celebrating the upcoming arrival of her baby boy. The firm came together with thoughtful gifts, delicious food, and plenty of desserts to shower her with love.



February 14, 2025

Valentine's Day in the Office

Our office got festive for Valentine's Day! The office was decked out in pink and red, with themed heart-shaped pizzas, a build your own ice cream sundae bar, and lots of sweet treats to celebrate Valentine's Day together.



March 17, 2025

St. Patrick's Day Celebration

The office went green for St. Patrick's Day! Everyone enjoyed corned beef sandwiches and green wraps from Lovi's Deli, along with festive green donuts from Krispy Kreme to top it all off.



April 11, 2025

Retirement Celebration for Leslie & Suzanne

We honored attorneys Leslie Blozan and Suzanne Feffer with a retirement celebration at Joey's Woodland Hills. It was a wonderful evening filled with good food, laughter, and heartfelt moments. While they continue to help part-time, they are deeply missed around the office.



April 23, 2025

Administrative Professionals Day

We hosted a big celebration featuring self-care goodie bags, an açai cart for breakfast, Panini Grill for lunch, a mini pancake bar for dessert, and relaxing massages throughout the day. We also celebrated our administrative team all week long with daily breakfasts sponsored by our Partners, Greg Stone, Kristi Dean, and Gregg Garfinkel.



August 13, 2025

Summer Event at Topanga Social

Our annual summer outing was held at Topanga Social, followed by an adventurous experience at Red Door Escape Rooms. Many groups successfully escaped! We ended the night on a sweet note with an ice cream cart treat.



September 9, 2025

Lucy's Baby Shower

We came together once again to surprise Legal Assistant Lucy Assadourian with a baby shower celebrating her baby boy. She was showered with love and gifts from the whole office.





STONE | DEAN LLP
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

21052 Oxnard Street
Woodland Hills, CA 91367

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NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

→ **Congratulations to Gregg S. Garfinkel**, who secured outright dismissals of three transportation law matters via federal court Motions to Dismiss. Gregg utilized his own published decisions in two 9th Circuit Court of Appeals matters as the legal basis for these results.

→ Top Defense Case of the Week

Elnoz Faiazi secured a major legal victory in *Martinez v. Food 4 Less*, earning recognition in the *Daily Journal* as a Top Defense Case of the Week. The court granted the defendant's Motion for Summary Judgement after Faiazi argued the store lacked notice of a salsa spill that caused a slip just 6 minutes later. A sweep had occurred 40 minutes prior.

→ **Kudos to Gregg S. Garfinkel** who recently presented a number of cases to the Conference of Freight Counsel in Boston, Massachusetts. The Conference is comprised of the nation's foremost experts on transportation and logistics law and meets twice a year to discuss issues of paramount importance to our nation's transportation industry.

→ **Congratulations to Justene Adamec**, who won a summary judgment getting the entire case thrown out in a slip and fall action. The Court agreed with us that Plaintiff needed facts rather than "what if" scenarios to reach the triable issue of fact standard for surviving a summary judgment.

→ **Congratulations to Greg Stone** who successfully defended a criminal contempt trial in Santa Barbara involving a client allegedly violating a restraining order. Greg defended the client in a long fought, very emotional civil case. The restraining order stemmed from that case before SD being retained. Greg was able to diffuse the civil situation and obtain a judgment of dismissal of the criminal contempt charge.

→ **Congratulations to Greg Stone** after a several week- long bench trial in Ventura involving issues of water rights, easements and trespass was able to negotiate a resolution and closure. A large shout out goes to the trial judge, Judge Ronda J. McKaig, who's patience and skill help effectuate the closure.

STONE | DEAN LLP

21052 Oxnard Street
Woodland Hills, CA 91367
T: (818) 999-2232
F: (818) 999-2269

Questions or Comments:

Gregg Garfinkel – Editor
ggarfinkel@stonedeanlaw.com

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www.stonedeanlaw.com

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