

Louisiana bar gathers to talk oil spill litigation

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You could call it an oil spill powwow for the legal profession.

The Louisiana State Bar Association on May 25 is hosting an oil spill symposium at the New Orleans Sheraton Hotel, where an estimated 200-plus lawyers will gather to hear legal and environmental experts discuss issues surrounding the Gulf of Mexico disaster.



**Neblett, Beard &
Arsenault's Richard
Arsenault**

Among the goals of the event, said one organizer, will be to prevent another Exxon Valdez situation, in which plaintiffs are still waiting two decades after the accident for the full damages to be paid.

"Hopefully, we'll have a situation where we can look at the Valdez case and learn from that experience and expedite the process and make it more efficient for all the plaintiffs involved," said Richard Arsenault of Neblett, Beard & Arsenault in Alexandria, La., who is co-chairing the event.

Some of the best-known names in the plaintiffs' bar are scheduled to speak. Elizabeth Cabraser of San Francisco's Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, whose firm represented plaintiffs in the Exxon Valdez litigation, will talk about lessons learned from that oil spill. And W. Mark Lanier and Dana Taschner, both of The Lanier Law Firm, will discuss damage control and trial techniques.

Among others on the 11 planned panels are Brian Barr of Pensacola, Fla.'s Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Echsner, Rafferty & Proctor and Stephen Herman of New Orleans' Herman Herman Katz & Cotlar, who will discuss Coast Guard issues. U.S. District Judge Jay Zainey, who sits in New Orleans, will speak at a session titled "Lawyers Under a Microscope: Mass Tort, Class Action and Complex Litigation."

Political consultant and pundit James Carville, who grew up in Louisiana, is set to be the keynote speaker, discussing regulatory failures and the tort system's safety net.

According to Arsenault, at least 230 people — including defense and plaintiffs' attorneys — have registered for the

event. He expects a 50-50 mix of plaintiffs' and defense lawyers.

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