

Asbestos Litigation And The State Of The Economy

(NAPSA)—It has been said that every person is entitled to his/her day in court. Unfortunately, in the view of many top attorneys, some people are having a few too many days in court—and as a result, the economy is hurting and potential plaintiffs aren't being given the opportunity to be heard, or to receive the damages to which they're entitled.

One area where things have gotten particularly out of hand is in asbestos litigation. In the last 20 years, as more has been learned about the long-term effects of asbestos exposure—and more people have developed cancer and other life-threatening illnesses as a result of their exposure to the fiber—the plaintiffs have had their day in court, seeking damages for what they have had to endure.

In many ways, there is a sort of nobility to this process, where people get what's rightfully theirs. However, over the past several years, things have gotten out of hand. Consider that, in October 2001, a Mississippi jury awarded six plaintiffs in an asbestos case a total of \$150 million. That's \$25 million apiece. Excessive? Definitely, especially when you consider the fact that none of the claimants are sick, or showed any symptoms or ill effects related to their exposure to asbestos.

This sort of result is increasingly common, as avaricious attorneys shop their questionable cases around until they find a sympa-



Questionable asbestos cases are making lawyers rich and driving businesses into bankruptcy.

thetic judge and jury—called “venue shopping.” This, despite the fact that, according to a recent report, “Between two-thirds and 90 percent of all claimants are functionally unimpaired, meaning that their asbestos exposure has not so far affected their ability to perform activities of daily life.”

It is estimated that, by the time this legal manipulation has run its course, more than two million asbestos cases will have been filed—with a cost to American businesses of \$275 billion.

Questionable claims are the resulting settlements and verdicts are forcing companies into dire financial straits and sparking bankruptcy filings. At the same time, many of those who are seriously ill from exposure to asbestos are seeing their compensation delayed and reduced. If the present course continues, there may not be any money left to pay the sick.