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Energy Committee Spotlight

Energy and Public Utility

Interviews and Profiles



James Dixon is vice president for legal services at ConEdison Development and ConEdison Energy. He is also the compliance officer for all of Con Edison's non-regulated competitive energy companies. ConEdison Development is a developer and owner/operator of large scale renewable energy generation facilities, and ConEdison Energy is a provider of energy management services such as generation-facility asset management and wholesale energy procurement and sales. He

began working for Con Edison over 30 years ago as an electrical engineer, while attending law school at night.

What interested you in in-house practice, and how did you come to be an attorney at Consolidated Edison Energy Inc.?

I always wanted to be an attorney, consequently studying engineering and working in that field was a means to that end. ConEdison gave me the opportunity to reach my goal, which engendered in me loyalty and commitment to the company, so it was natural that I stayed here in-house. But what has kept me here is that the ConEdison general counsel that I have worked for have constantly given me new and challenging tasks and assignments that have fostered my personal and professional growth, culminating in my move from litigation for the utility company to the exciting (and sometimes terrifying) world of being a general counsel for businesses in competitive energy markets. Simply put, they let me be all that I could be!

What is the single greatest challenge facing your law department, and how are you dealing with it?

Using limited legal resources to keep up with a rapidly growing business in an ever-changing market. I am the only attorney for ConEdison Development, which has developed or acquired over a dozen solar and wind projects in 3 ½ years, and I am one of two attorneys who work with ConEdison Energy to address legal needs driven by dynamic energy trading markets. Add to that my compliance responsibilities (remember Dodd-Frank anyone?) and there's more work than can possibly be handled. Innovative use of trusted outside counsel with which I have built strong relationships is one way I address the challenge. Recently, for the first time, I used a bid process to solicit new ideas from six of our law firm partners to address a backlog of contracts. The approach yielded a significant cost savings and had the added benefit of building a closer relationship with an experienced outside resource. Knowing and using the exceptional talent of our business associates to assist us with matters is another way I handle the challenge.

In October 2014, you were elected chair of the Energy Committee. How did you get involved initially?

I attended the Energy Committee's 2010 annual meeting and was very impressed by then-chair Vince Gonzales and by the exceptional associates of the committee's sponsor — Sutherland Asbill. I expressed interest in doing more than just participating in the meeting to Sheri Palomaki, Sutherland's committee coordinator. Next thing I knew I was taking meeting minutes as the secretary. The rest is, as they say, history.

What are some of the ways that the Energy Committee provides value to its members?

We really try to listen to what our committee members want and need. It starts at the annual meeting where we consistently generate 25-30 ideas for programs and resources. Sutherland then works collaboratively with us to develop highly relevant content to address those ideas. The quality of that content was recently recognized by ACC, which lauded Sutherland for a webcast that has achieved over 100 views. For another example, go to our committee page and you will find a compilation of all

the resources that the committee generated last year. Sutherland published this in the form of a desk reference book that attendees at the annual meeting were given to take back home with them.

What substantive practice issues does your committee address?

Energy encompasses a wide and varied universe of substantive areas of law such as transactions, mergers and acquisitions, regulatory, litigation and alternative dispute resolution, privacy and many more. Our members practice in traditional markets, such as oil and gas, and new and evolving markets such as renewable energy. With such a diversity of interests, it's a challenge to find issues that have broad appeal.

How has the Energy Committee helped you in your career?

It has given me an opportunity to foster great relationships with smart people who are an invaluable source of information and experience to draw on. Also, I consistently use the resources that the Energy Committee has developed to keep up to date on legal trends and to fill gaps in my knowledge of areas of the law.

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