

Ruckelshaus' Law Firm Kept In Touch With the EPA

Washington

The law firm established by William D. Ruckelshaus, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, got in touch with officials in that agency more than 178 times for 20 different clients in 1974 and 1975.

The law firm's informal efforts for its clients, many of which had pollution problems that had been challenged by the environmental agency, became known from an examination of government files made available in response to a request by the New York Times under the Freedom of Information Act.

The contacts with the agency by Ruckelshaus and other members of his firm for such clients as the vinyl chloride industry, two aluminum companies, a drug concern and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico did not appear to violate federal law or the ethical rules of the American Bar Association.

But the record of informal approaches — frequently by telephone, on other occasions in meetings and dinners and sometimes by letter — provide a rare insight into an aspect of the legal profession in Washington that has faced increas-



WILLIAM RUCKELSHAUS
Unreachable for comment

ingly critical questions by legal experts, public interest groups and political candidates.

Ruckelshaus went to the EPA as its first director on Dec. 2, 1970, and left on April 28, 1973. A bit more than a year later, on June 1, 1974, he established his law firm. Well over half the firm's initial partners were former agency officials, and, at least in the beginning,

a substantial number of its clients were those who had problems with the agency.

On August 1, Ruckelshaus left his firm to become senior vice president of the Weyerhaeuser Co., a major West Coast forest products company.

Now on vacation, Ruckelshaus could not be reached for comment on the activities of his firm while he headed it.

But Albert J. Beveridge III, now the senior partner of the firm, said in an interview that the activities of Ruckelshaus and other partners were "legal, ethical and met our personal standards of appropriateness."

The agency material is believed to provide an unusual and detailed profile of a major, if seldom charted, aspect of the functions of the federal government: how a Washington law firm goes about assisting its clients.

In the 18 months covered by the material, nine lawyers in the firm made at least 178 identifiable contacts with officials in the agency for 20 different clients, an average of more than two contacts every week. The largest number of these contacts, 98, involved telephone conversations; 38 involved meetings and meals; 30 involved letters and 12 were unclear.

Five of the nine lawyers making the contacts for the firm previously held various positions in the agency.

The records suggest that Ruckelshaus made 27 of the 178 contacts. The most active partner, with 90 contacts, was Gary H. Baise. During most of Ruckelshaus' time in the agency in several other government positions, Baise served as Ruckelshaus' right-hand man.

The 20 clients the Ruckelshaus firm represented were highly varied, but records indicate that the largest number of contacts — 37 out of 178 — were made by members of the Ruckelshaus firm for the Society of the Plastics Industry, a powerful trade association.

The subject, which has still not been finally resolved, involved the air pollution controls that the agency would impose to protect the public from polyvinyl chloride, a widely used plastic that at some stages of manufacture is a potential cause of cancer. *New York Times*