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**Robinson & Cole Elevates Six New Counsel**

**HARTFORD, CT** (December 16, 2010) – The law firm of Robinson & Cole LLP is pleased to announce the election of six new counsel: Cynthia R. Christie, Melissa M. Mack, John A. Poakeart, Elizabeth M. Smith, Melissa Sullivan, and Deborah A. Vennos.

**Cynthia R. Christie** is a member of the Employee Benefits and Compensation Group and focuses her practice on advising private and public sector employers with respect to qualified and nonqualified retirement plans as well as welfare benefit plans. She counsels clients regarding issues arising from the creation and administration of employee benefit plans; assists clients with all aspects of plan design and administration; advises clients as to the impact of ERISA, the Internal Revenue Code, and other governing laws on the design and operation of employee benefit plans; and assists clients in interpreting plan terms with respect to plan administration and benefit determinations. Ms. Christie also provides clients with advice on plan compliance and correction issues and has extensive experience in correcting plan failures. She is admitted to practice in Connecticut.

**Melissa M. Mack** is an attorney in the firm's Tax-Exempt Organizations Group. She represents public charities, family and corporate foundations, educational institutions, health care organizations, cultural and performing arts organizations, and humanitarian and social services organizations. Ms. Mack counsels tax-exempt clients with respect to formation, application for exempt status, regulatory compliance, contracting, executive compensation, governance, fiduciary duties, endowments, charitable giving, policy development, joint ventures, and strategic planning. She represents clients in matters before the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Revenue Services, the Connecticut attorney general, the probate courts, and other regulatory authorities. Ms. Mack is admitted to practice in Connecticut.

**John A. Poakeart** is a member of the Environmental and Utilities Practice Group. His practice represents a blend of environmental and public utilities experience, a useful conflation of ability in an age of increased interest in climate change, energy efficiency, sustainability, and the utilization of brownfields for renewable energy projects. Mr. Poakeart's environmental practice involves regulatory compliance and transactional counseling; federal, state, and local permitting and enforcement; site remediation and brownfield redevelopment; and sustainability and climate change counseling. His public utilities practice includes regulatory and transactional counseling in energy, telecommunications, natural gas, CATV/video, and water matters, as well as regulatory and transactional matters involving renewable energy projects and services. Mr. Poakeart's litigation experience in state and federal courts includes administrative appeals and CERCLA, Clean Water Act, mold, and asbestos matters. He is admitted to practice in Connecticut and New York.

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280 Trumbull Street, Hartford, CT 06103

## New Counsel Page 2

**Elizabeth M. Smith** is a member of the Labor and Employment Group. She concentrates her practice in the areas of commercial litigation, employment law, and regulatory affairs. She has appeared in state and federal court and before administrative agencies on behalf of clients in the areas of banking, financial services, insurance, public utilities, telecommunications, and health care. Ms. Smith provides litigation defense and counseling for employers in a variety of areas, including discrimination, retaliation, noncompetition agreements, trade secret protection, and contracts. Her practice also includes a variety of commercial litigation matters, including contract disputes, antitrust, intellectual property, and consumer lending claims. Ms. Smith is admitted to practice in Connecticut.

**Melissa Sullivan** is a member of the Products Liability and Subrogation Group as well as the Commercial Litigation Group. She concentrates her practice in the areas of large loss property subrogation, products liability defense, and commercial litigation. She has pursued and defended against a wide range of claims arising out of casualties, such as fires, explosions, and sprinkler and other equipment failures. She has asserted and actively litigated claims brought pursuant to products liability law, negligence, failure to warn, and the Uniform Commercial Code in a variety of state and federal courts. Ms. Sullivan also represents companies in a range of complex commercial disputes, including claims of fraud, breach of consumer protection laws, and other business torts, breach of commercial contracts, and partnership agreements. She is admitted to practice in Connecticut, the District of Columbia, and New York.

**Deborah A. Vennos** is a member of the Insurance & Reinsurance, Environmental, and Utilities Practice Groups. Her Ph.D. in chemistry provides a solid foundation for her focus on disputes involving scientific and engineering principles. Ms. Vennos has handled a wide range of litigation matters, including multimillion-dollar insurance claims related to landfills, complex building design defects, sinkholes, and reconstruction efforts post-Hurricane Katrina and Wilma. Her experience in the area of environmental litigation includes defending a municipality with respect to a landfill construction and closure matter, counseling clients on multiple CERCLA sites and defending an environmental class action involving groundwater and indoor air issues on behalf of hundreds of residents. She is versed in the technical and legal issues of green building and the LEED system. Ms. Vennos is admitted to practice in Connecticut and New York.

### More about Robinson & Cole LLP

Founded in 1845, Robinson & Cole has 225 attorneys and 250 professional staff in nine offices to serve regional, national, and global business clients in multiple practice areas, as well as individual clients and governmental and nonprofit entities. Further information is available at [rc.com](http://rc.com).

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