

Industries

Consumable Goods

Energy

Manufacturing

Renewables

Practice Areas

Construction

Acquisitions & Divestitures

Corporate Law

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Health Care

Outside General Counsel Services

Private Equity & Venture

Venture

Bar Memberships

Ohio

Christopher S. Habel

Partner

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Chris Habel is the Partner-in-Charge of FBT Gibbons' Cincinnati office, where he leads more than 250 attorneys and business professionals. He helps drive the firm's strategy and transformative initiatives alongside other executives in Greater Cincinnati. Chris thrives on envisioning, planning, and executing complex projects that make a significant impact for his clients, the firm, and the communities he serves.

In his legal practice, Chris handles all areas of environmental law, with a focus on contaminated land. He serves as primary outside environmental counsel to large industrial clients with portfolios of environmentally impaired legacy properties, as well as third-party sites where they are potentially responsible parties (PRPs). Chris helps his clients solve business and regulatory challenges with creative, pragmatic solutions.

Clients value Chris's business intellect, judgment, and problem-solving skills – refined over 40 years of experience that began in construction, progressed through engineering, and ultimately led to law. His combined knowledge of the construction, engineering, and legal industries enables him to offer a commonsense approach to managing complex projects, and to communicate effectively in any setting – whether in a construction trailer, a courtroom, or a boardroom. A lifelong learner with a passion for business, manufacturing, construction and technology, Chris digs deep to understand his clients' needs at their level.

Chris's Relevant Experience

Legal Work Highlights

Representing two large publicly traded international manufacturing clients on a portfolio of contaminated properties. This work involves daily interaction with the clients, their environmental consultants and regulatory agencies. Chris is embedded with the project teams and often a key player in the development and execution of eight-figure environmental investigations and remedial actions. In addition to leading detailed technical conversations with the environmental consultants and remediation contractors, Chris is tasked with navigating the regulatory programs and representing these clients in litigation.

Working with client team to investigate and remediate 1,500-acre site that had experienced a century of mining, ore processing, smelting and chemical manufacturing. Chris negotiated an agreement under the state brownfield program. He worked with the project team to ensure the work was completed to the satisfaction of the state environmental regulators to obtain liability protection for the client. The project was recognized with a Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence. Going beyond remediation, Chris and the client have focused on restoration of ecosystems on the property to advance the sustainability and biodiversity initiatives of the client.

Representing multinational company on development of utility-scale 135 MW solar energy project on brownfield site located within Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) territory.

Representing large company as plaintiff in action against a neighboring landfill that is continuously discharging leachate into streams and groundwater that pollutes client's property and a 60-acre lake. The case has had proceedings in federal and state court, including appeals before the Tennessee Supreme Court and United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.

Representing Port Authority on multiple land assemblage projects involving remediation and redevelopment of brownfields. Sites involved include former chemical plants, foundries and heavy industrial properties.

Representing large industrial client on two projects involving the investigation and remediation of sediment in Newark Bay and the Staten Island Sound in New Jersey.

Represented timber company in negotiation of carbon credit sales contract supported by its sustainable forestry operations.

Represented large industrial client in defense of litigation involving $40 million in remediation of contaminated sediment in the Hudson River adjacent to chemical plant.

Represented Greater Cincinnati Water Works against another municipality in litigation involving water service area dispute, winning every issue in the case on summary judgment.

Represented national homebuilder on a subdivision constructed on a former shooting range that was contaminated with lead and arsenic. This high-profile case with local and national media coverage became a U.S. EPA Superfund site where homes were repurchased, the entire subdivision was investigated for contamination, 23,000 tons of contaminated soil was removed and the homes were resold.

Assisted in the representation of multiple construction clients on geotechnical and structural engineering issues in major construction disputes. The issues have involved bad topographic surveys, catastrophic foundation system failures, landslides, faulty concrete and storm drainage system failures.

Successfully represented the National Solid Wastes Management Association in its challenge to a rule enacted by a Canton-area solid waste management district that would disrupt the management of solid waste throughout much of northeast Ohio. After a weeklong bench trial, the case was ultimately resolved in the client's favor by the Ohio Supreme Court.

Represented solid waste industry clients in disputes with local governments over solid waste flow control and disposal fee ordinances.

Completed air emissions calculations, performed dispersion modeling of air emissions and obtained minor, synthetic minor and

major source Title V air permits for numerous air emissions sources.

On behalf of a potential buyer, led the environmental due diligence on a bankrupt oil refinery and several gas stations prior to auction sale.

On behalf of a bankruptcy trustee, handled the environmental aspects on the liquidation of over 70 convenience stores with fuel islands.

Led multimedia environmental compliance audits of multiple steel mills.

Led the environmental compliance audit of more than 750 facilities in 39 states for a nationwide telecommunications client. Through use of U.S. EPA's Environmental Audit Policy and state equivalents, more than $2 million in penalties were waived. Headed a similar audit of 450 facilities in three states that resulted in waivers of over $900,000 in penalties.

Assisted in the audit of a regional hospital system and negotiated purchase agreement to address compliance issues.

Assisted in the successful challenge of a surface mining permit issued in a prime agriculture area and successfully defended a surface mining permit issued near a historic civil war battlefield.

Assisted in the successful defense of an above-ground storage tank construction contractor on a multi-million-dollar federal case involving an alleged 38,000-gallon gasoline leak to soil and groundwater.

Provided support and oversight on the closure of more than 60 underground storage tanks in Ohio and Kentucky including corrective actions and pursuing state UST fund reimbursement claims.

Represented numerous landlords and a large metropolitan school district on lead-based paint concerns and enforcement actions brought by local health departments, U.S. EPA and HUD.

Business and Civic Highlights

Co-Founder and board chair of Valley View Foundation, a startup nonprofit that raised over $4 million in private and public funds to acquire and create a nature preserve on 190-acres of greenspace that includes a 200+ year old farmhouse in a suburb of Cincinnati.

Played a leading role in the merger and integration of Downtown Cincinnati Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to beautification, safety and vibrancy of Cincinnati's Central Business District, into 3CDC, Cincinnati's community development corporation that has transformed the nationally renowned historic Over the Rhine District.

Played a leading role in the reform of Uptown Consortium, Inc., the community development corporation that serves in Cincinnati's second largest economic district that is home to the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Served on Cincinnati Futures Commission, which was led by the CEOs of Procter & Gamble and 5/3 Bank, working on the financial sustainability of the City of Cincinnati.

As a volunteer board member, Chris has shared his construction and engineering expertise to help implement over $200 million in capital improvement construction projects for multiple nonprofits including Cincinnati Museum Center, Valley View Foundation, Christ the King Parish & Cardinal Pacelli School, St. Xavier High School, and the historic restoration of the Taft Museum of Art, a National Historic Landmark.

Accepted American Heart Association 2025 Heart of the City award on behalf of the Habel family at the annual Greater Cincinnati AHA Heart Ball Gala that raised over $1.5 million for heart and stroke research.

Ten-year Member and Chair of the firm's Advancement Committee. In his role as Chair, Chris was responsible for recruiting, performance reviews, compensation, promotions, and all aspects of talent management for approximately 300 attorneys across all firm offices. Chris was the innovator who revamped the attorney recruiting and evaluation processes from the ground up and developed and implemented the First Year Associate program to

"build better lawyers faster" that remains a key differentiator for the firm.

Other Info About Chris

Education

The Ohio State University, Moritz College of Law, J.D., 1995

University of Cincinnati College of Engineering, B.S., Civil & Environmental Engineering, 1992

St. Xavier High School, Class of '87

Courts

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio

U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio

U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals

Recognition

Selected to Ohio Super Lawyers, 2010-2026 and Ohio Rising Stars, 2005-2007

The Best Lawyers in America®: Environmental Law, 2006-2027, "Lawyer of the Year," 2018; Litigation – Environmental 2011-2027, "Lawyer of the Year," 2024

Chambers USA, Natural Resources & Environment, 2006-2017; Environment, 2023-2026

Forbes, Best-in-State Top Lawyers, 2025

Cincy Magazine Power 100, 2016-2025

League of Ohio Sportsmen State Conservationist of the Year, 2014

Professional Affiliations

American Bar Association

Ohio State Bar Association – Environmental Law Section

Cincinnati Bar Association – Environmental Law Committee, former Chair

Vistage – Member, 2016-present

Civic Activities

Cincinnati Regional Business Committee (CRBC) – Board Member / Executive Committee Member / Co-Chair of Government Affairs Committee

Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) – Board Member / Executive Committee Member / Chair of Center City Management Committee

Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Cincinnati – Board Member / Executive Committee Member / General Counsel

Commonwealth Club of Cincinnati – Member / Executive Committee Member and Secretary (2024-25)

Queen City Club – Member

Cincinnati Museum Center – Board Member / Chair of Facilities Committee

St. Xavier High School – Board Member / Facilities Committee Member

University of Cincinnati Alpaugh Family Economics Center for Education & Research – Past Chair of the Board of Trustees / Executive Committee Member / Chair of Governance Committee

Taft Museum of Art – Vice Chair of the Board of Directors / Chair of Building & Grounds Committee

Cincinnati Futures Commission – Member

Pro Bono Partnership of Ohio – Past Board Member / Emeritus Board Member

Ohio Supreme Court Commission on the Rules of Practice & Procedure – Past Appointed Member

American Heart Association – Chair of Cincinnati Heart Mini Marathon & Walk (2019) / Heart of the City Award (2025)

Valley View Foundation – Co-Founder / Chair of the Board of Directors

National Legal Mentoring Consortium – Advisory Board Member

Our Lord Christ the King Church & Cardinal Pacelli School – Festival Co-Chair (2011) / Capital Campaign Co-Chair (2012) / Atrium Construction Project Co-Chair (2017-18) / School Advisory Committee (2014-17)

Hamilton County Tax Levy Review Committee – Past Member / Chair of Children's Services Levy Review Subcommittee (2011) / Chair of Mental Health Services Levy Review Subcommittee (2012)

Hamilton County Earthworks Appeals Board – Member

Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber – Leadership Cincinnati Class 37 (2014) /C-Change Young Professional Leadership Program, Inaugural Class (2006)

Cincinnati Bar Association's Academy of Leadership for Lawyers – Class of 2001

Greater Cincinnati Metropolitan Sewer District Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Long Term Control Plan Update – Steering Committee Member

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