

newsworthy trends

Katrina, Supreme Court Named 2005 Top Legal Events

(NAPSA)—Hurricane Katrina, the Supreme Court shake-up and new bankruptcy laws were recently named the top legal events of 2005. The Legal Year in Review Survey, conducted annually by Thomson West, sampled legal experts from across the country.

“Hurricane Katrina, while not technically a legal event, will have continuing legal fallout,” said Dee Pridgen, author of “Consumer Credit and the Law.” “Contracts were broken, jobs were lost and leases were abandoned. All of these issues may result in significant litigation for some time.” Pridgen also noted that, as rebuilding ramps up, consumers could fall prey to home repair, foreclosure and other consumer scams.

Changes to the U.S. Supreme Court also topped the survey. Experts said the court may turn to the right with President Bush’s two appointments, but that only time will tell how the new make-up of the court will affect the country’s future.

The Supreme Court case most noted was *Kelo v. City of New London*. The high court ruled municipalities can use eminent domain to seize private property in order to turn it over to a private developer.

“Many people mistakenly believed the ruling would lead to wholesale condemnation of people’s homes to benefit private developers. But the Court ruled any such taking of private property has to be part of a comprehensive development plan that provides appreciable economic benefits to the community,” said James Kushner, author of “Subdivision Law &



Recent natural disasters and new laws will have a big impact.

Growth Management.”

Another top legal event, as named in the survey, was bankruptcy reform. Joe Lee, who wrote “Bankruptcy: A Practice Systems Library Manual,” explained the new law this way: “The Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act works a sea change in bankruptcy law by restricting access of individual debtors to Chapter 7 relief.”

Hugh Ray, author of “Creditor’s Rights (Texas Practice Guide)”, said negative reactions to the law are overstated. “The positive aspects of the new bankruptcy law are shorter and less expensive bankruptcies, as well as fewer bankruptcies. People can’t file over and over. It’s something that’s different and requires education on the part of lawyers and the public.”

Other legal issues mentioned in the survey included the debate over same-sex marriage, the change to nonmandatory federal sentencing guidelines, tort reform and restricted access to jury trials.