

## Felicity Fowler in Texas Lawyer: Oil Plunge Puts Employment Lawyers to Work

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April 5, 2016

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**PRACTICES** Oil and Gas, Labor and Employment

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With the price of oil plunging from more than \$100 a barrel to less than \$30, energy companies are struggling with a myriad of labor and employment challenges, including some that have forced them into the courts.

The downturn in prices has left cash-strapped energy companies searching for ways to shore up their operations and improve their bottom line. In the midst of the turmoil, thousands of workers in the energy industry have lost their jobs...

According to [Felicity Fowler](#), a labor and employment partner in the Houston office of Haynes Boone, the oil industry's dual response to low prices—conducting mass layoffs while continuing to hire younger workers—can expose employers to significant potential liabilities for failure to comply with federal and state regulations that govern a reduction in force or RIF. Older workers many times are the ones employers want to get rid of because they have higher salaries, thereby increasing a company's costs, Fowler said.

"Age discrimination is a hot issue," she said.

Employers may ask employees to whom incentives have been offered to sign a release of employment claims under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1954, WARN Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and Age Discrimination in Employment Act. But for a release of age discrimination claims, there has to be "specific magic language" in the agreement, Fowler said.

"An agreement has to be written in a manner that can be understood by the average employee," she said. "It can't be too complicated."

**Excerpted from *Texas Lawyer*. To read the full article, click [here](#) (subscription required).**