

Norton Rose loses LatAm veteran Willie Wood

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Norton Rose Fulbright's Latin American practice has suffered another blow, losing long-serving regional head Willie Wood to US litigation powerhouse McKool Smith.



Wood will lead McKool Smith's energy disputes department in Houston, and is followed by Norton Rose associates Justin Tschoepe and Lauren Varnado, who also join as partners.

The hire was announced on 7 March.

Wood, who joined Norton Rose in 1984 and became head of its Latin American practice in 2002, focuses his practice on high-value international arbitration and litigation cases, primarily in the energy sector.

Speaking on the switch, Wood says he felt it was time to try something new, and the opportunity to build McKool's Latin American practice from scratch was too good to pass up. "It is a great move for both of us; I understand the business and culture of the region and in turn will get the freedom to establish the McKool name in Latin America" he says.

Wood adds that he's looking forward to being less constricted by the conflicts of interest he experienced at a firm as large as Norton Rose. "It is inevitable in such a big multidisciplinary firm, and at McKool I can work on more contingency fee arrangements and have the freedom to be more entrepreneurial," he says. "In the future, we will definitely cross-collaborate with Norton Rose in the disputes arena," he adds.

McKool intends to expand in Latin America and win more litigation, arbitration, investigations and insolvency work.

Norton Rose has had a tough time in Latin America recently. It [lost](#) its Venezuelan office to Dentons in January and [suffered](#) senior partner-level departures in Bogotá a year before. That came after Chadbourne & Parke LLP highly regarded Latin American practice in New



York [spurned](#) it after the two firms [merged](#) in 2017 (although Chadbourne's consultancy office in São Paulo and its Mexico City branch stayed put).

Still, Norton Rose's leadership remains upbeat about its prospects in the region. Peter Martyr, the firm's global chief executive, says the firm has 40 lawyers based in the region and 40 more Latin America-focused lawyers worldwide. "We are expanding in both Mexico and Brazil, recently announcing the lateral hire of a team of three lawyers as well as the transfer of Leopoldo Olavarria in Mexico City along with the arrival of a new lawyer in São Paulo," he says. The firm also shored up its New York office in 2018, when it hired a Latin American-focused banking lawyer from Mayer Brown LLP.

Daryl Lansdale, [Norton Rose Fulbright](#)'s managing partner, wishes Wood all the best in his new endeavour and says he looks forward to possible collaboration opportunities with him at his new firm.

McKool Smith was founded in 1991 and has approximately 175 lawyers spread across offices in Austin, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Marshall, New York, Silicon Valley, and Washington, DC.