Since 1952, the water in Hinkley, CA, was contaminated for decades by a heavy metal carcinogen released by Pacific Gas and Electric. The town had no idea about this pollution until 1993 when a legal clerk named Erin Brockovich noticed a trend in illnesses among the locals. Brockovich and her legal firm sued Pacific Gas and Electric and after a three-year battle, the plaintiffs won $333 million. However, instead of any improvement in the town, since the settlement, Hinkley residents have been deserting their small community leaving barely 1,900 residents in 2000. Instead of any re-development efforts to benefit locals, or cleaning up efforts of the ground into which the chemical had leached, Pacific Gas and Electric has been buying homes and surrounding areas leaving the residents with no recourse but to abandon their community.

This paper examines the aftermath of what has been termed the “Erin Brockovich” case. What has happened to the town? What has been the response of the media to the trouble of the town after the immense publicity brought on by the Hollywood film Erin Brockovich? The paper argues that media coverage of the environmental disaster created by Pacific Gas and Electric was not well publicized. Although this case was the largest settlement paid in a direct-action lawsuit at its time, the small town of Hinkley was quickly forgotten.