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ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

Climate Challenge Pushes Law Offices to Go Green

BY JOHN S. KIRK

Special to the Legal

Last year, the American Bar Association section of environment, energy and resources, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched the ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge. The Climate Challenge program provides a menu of options that law offices can use to take specific steps to conserve energy and resources as well as reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

The Climate Challenge has several initiatives, all of which are listed on the ABA Web site (www.abanet.org/environ/climate-challenge). The site offers guidance for participating in the Climate Challenge program, including the following steps to join in the effort:

- Adopt best practices for office paper management by reducing paper usage, increasing recycled content in paper purchased or increasing recycling.
- Participate in the EPA's WasteWise program, which encourages organizations to save energy by reducing waste, and adopt best practices for office paper management (described above).
- Participate in the EPA's Green Power Partnership program by purchasing energy from renewable sources to cover at least a portion of electricity usage.
- Participate in the EPA's Energy Star, which encourages law offices to reduce energy use by at least 10 percent through, among other things, the purchase of Energy Star-designated equipment and



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implementation of better energy management practices. This program has features that recognize the issues associated with tenant law offices.

There are countless resources available to give you guidance on the steps that you can take in your organizations. Even if you are not in a position to meet all of the Climate Challenge requirements, simply starting out by implementing one or two best practices can go a long way in advancing the ball. The Climate Challenge Web site (<http://www.abanet.org/environ/climatechallenge/wastewise.shtml#top>) has several links to other sites that contain hundreds of references and tips for becoming more enviro-friendly.

The ABA is not alone in advancing sustainability programs. The Massachusetts Bar Association's energy and environmental task force launched a pledge program to its members in September 2007. Billed as "Green Guidelines," the program offers a comprehensive guide to

help lawyers reduce energy and resource consumption. As an additional step to raise the level of awareness and ease of participation, the bar's Web site offers weekly "Eco-Tips." The bar is joined in this program by the Conservation Law Foundation, a leading environmental advocacy organization serving the New England area.

GAINING MOMENTUM

Our firm joined the ABA program as a pilot participant in mid-2007. At that time, there were six firms. At last check, there were nearly 40 firms, with a total of almost 100 office locations, participating as leaders or partners in the Eco-Challenge program. This is a great testament to the support of the program, and our industry's recognition of the need to push for greater environmental stewardship. Locally, with the legal industry being such a large part of the Delaware Valley area economy, we have the opportunity to make a significant impact.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Admittedly, some of the steps are easier to take than others. For example, if your office is in leased space, your landlord may or may not be interested in purchasing green power. Tenants in some buildings also encounter roadblocks trying to implement collection of recyclable materials — such as office paper, newspapers, magazines, bottles and cans — by the landlord's cleaning crew. In checking with fellow legal administrators in the

Philadelphia area, it appears that approximately half of the office buildings provide collection programs. However, several law firms located in buildings without recycling programs have initiated their own collection programs, voluntarily incurring additional costs to become more eco-friendly.

Some of the easier steps are found in the EPA WasteWise guidelines, which include using recycled paper in photocopiers and laser printers. While recycled paper tends to be a bit more expensive, rationalize it as part expense but also part investment in a healthier environment. Additionally, consider purchasing legal pads made from recycled paper, which are no more costly than the traditional yellow legal pads.

To put the recycled paper products and environmental impact into better perspective, in 2005, the ABA estimated the number of lawyers in the United States at slightly more than 1.1 million. Using that number, consider the potential impact of participating solely in the WasteWise program. Using an illustration from the Law Office Climate Challenge section of the ABA Web site, a 20-attorney firm would use about 10 tons of paper per year. The life cycle of a ton of paper, from production to disposal in landfill, generates about 11 tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, that law firm would be responsible for generating more than 200 tons of CO₂ emissions on an annual basis. In its simplest form, increasing the demand for recycled paper will improve the level of recycling and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Another area of considerable waste is found with laser printers. Until a year ago, our firm had only one printer capable of two-sided printing. After converting nearly all draft printers to duplex, we have realized a 30 percent to 40 percent decrease in paper utilization. Thus, the greater cost for the paper can be nearly or completely offset by the reduction in paper utilization. Considerable paper and cost savings can also be achieved by using two-sided copying whenever possible, especially in those instances where you are keeping documents as file copies.

If your paper and stationery supplies vendor does not offer enviro-friendly products, consider using a different vendor. In the legal arena, All-State Legal is national in scope, offers many "green" paper products, and also has been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council Chain-of-Custody program. (FSC is an international nonprofit focusing on responsible forest management and the Chain-of-Custody certification guarantees that wood comes from responsibly managed forests, and that products are tracked throughout the supply chain, from the forest to the consumer.)

REDUCING POWER CONSUMPTION

The EPA offers substantial guidance in ways to reduce power consumption through their Energy Star, and Green Lights programs.

In its simplest form, the Energy Star program rates office machines (copiers, fax machines, computers) and appliances (refrigerators, ice makers, microwave ovens) for efficient electrical energy utilization. Energy Star compliant products are plentiful, and typically use 25 to 50 percent less power than their noncomplaint counterparts.

The EPA's Green Lights program is a voluntary initiative that encourages building owners and occupants to upgrade lighting and other energy management systems. Several years ago, our firm enrolled in the EPA's Green Lights and Energy Star Small Business Program. This entailed retrofitting all of our existing light fixtures using energy efficient T-8 fluorescent bulbs, de-lamping our fixtures from four bulbs to two, installing new ballasts and installing sensor light switches in our offices and conference rooms. We realized a healthy decrease in our energy usage, and estimate this conversion is saving us \$10,000 annually, not to mention the significant reduction in our carbon footprint. In fact, by the EPA's calculations, our firm's achievements with just the lighting upgrade equate to preventing over 190,000 pounds of carbon emissions

each year, or removing 19 cars from the highways, or planting 26 acres of trees.

The economics of going green do not always make "cents." While our firm is saving thousands of dollars per year on our electricity usage, our recycled paper products cost approximately 18 percent more than virgin paper products, so not every green option is more economical in terms of hard dollars. However, in 2006, the EPA had more than 1,900 corporations, government agencies, universities and other organizations participating in the WasteWise program. By the EPA's estimates, those organizations have collectively been responsible for reduction of 120 million tons of waste, and lowering green house gas emissions by more than 7.3 million tons. While some of these initiatives may not always make hard-dollar savings in the short term, the long-term impact on ecology and human health will pay dividends many times more valuable.

Green power, which is electricity from renewable sources, such as wind or solar power, can be a bit difficult to access in landlord-controlled buildings. However, it is gaining ground in many urban areas, and Pennsylvania is a leader in the production of renewable energy. With ever-increasing availability, green power will become more widespread, giving real estate developers, landlords and tenants more options.

Our firm's position is that the ABA's Climate Challenge program will gradually raise the level of awareness of our environmental stewardship responsibilities and how easy it is to go green with relatively little additional effort. Whether or not you agree with the sometimes-dire predictions regarding global warming, conserving our natural resources by participating in recycling programs and purchasing renewable energy just makes good sense. Also, it stands to follow that by raising the level of awareness in the work place, it will spill over into our activities outside the office. •