GREENING
Practical Steps Toward
YOUR
Responsible Environmental Stewardship
PRACTICE

BY CARTER E. STRANG
It has been said that “[o]ur only choice, whatever our dogma, is to protect the Earth. This is our common progress or our common ruin. There is nothing in between.”

It is incumbent upon attorneys to help protect the Earth because we are part of the problem. The typical attorney uses between 20,000 and 100,000 sheets of copy paper alone per year, much of it wastefully, resulting in environmental harm and unnecessary expense. Something as simple as resetting printers to print documents double-sided results in significantly less waste as well as cost savings. One firm that followed this practice reduced its paper use by 1,760,135 sheets, which saved 150 trees and 61,604 gallons of water and prevented the release of 97 tons of CO2 emissions. It also resulted in a yearly savings of more than $13,000, a true “win-win” for the firm and the environment.

Discussed in this article are practical steps you can take to “green” your legal practice—be it a firm, in-house legal department, nonprofit, or public entity—and in so doing, reduce office waste and costs.

Bar Association Programs

An ideal way to green your law firm is to take advantage of an existing bar association program. Various programs exist at the national, state, and local bar levels. Participation in a local (municipal or county) bar association green program is particularly advantageous because of the enhanced ability to work closely with bar staff and local attorneys in a way that enhances the local community. One such program, offered through the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA), is profiled below.

Should participation in a bar association program not be practical, you can still implement into your legal practice any of the bar or individual firm green initiatives discussed in this article.

Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Green Initiative

Launched in 2008, the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association’s (CMBA) Green Initiative may well be the most comprehensive local bar program of its type in the United States. The program is coordinated by the CMBA’s Green Initiative Committee, composed of a broad cross section of bar association members employed at law firms as well as non-lawyer affiliates (e.g., court reporting firms). The core mission of the committee is to promote sustainable environmental practices at law firms. The capstone is the Green Certification program—to create their own green committee to implement the CMBA certification requirements and serve as a liaison to the CMBA Green Initiative Committee.

The firm green committees have served as incubators of sustainable office practices which go beyond the CMBA certification requirements and are worthy of duplication by other firms. Below are some examples of firm initiatives:

- Earth Day programs, featuring speakers, green vendors, raffles, and prizes for those that bicycle, carpool, or take public transportation to work that day. One law firm featured local grown/organic wine and appetizers at its program.
- Bicycle clubs that promote recreational bicycling and the use of bicycling as transportation to work. One law firm arranged for the free use of showers for its participants.
- Green programs in collaboration with other tenants of the same office building and the building owner. One firm’s efforts led to a buildingwide recycling program and a green fair in the building lobby.
- Screen savers for firm computers that remind personnel to turn off their computers at the end of the day.
- Compost programs for coffee grounds and leftover office food.
- Discontinuance of disposable cups and water bottles.
- Adoption of a “single stream” waste-handling program wherein all non-food office waste is put in the same container and is separated later by the waste handling company.
- Green giveaways—such as reusable grocery totes with the firm logo, BPA-free water bottles, solar calculators, and flashlights made from recycled materials—along with information about the beneficial impact of their use.
Green newsletters and websites that include profiles of committee members and green activities, discussion of green practices in the home, and interactive postings. One firm posted a “freeboard,” where unwanted personal items are offered at no cost for anyone that wants them (bikes, furniture, etc.), reducing solid waste disposal. The same firm also had an interactive posting site for ride sharing.

Workplace contests that promote green practices.

Educational environmental DVDs using firm personnel. One firm created a series of DVDs that promoted recycling and reductions in energy use, both at the office and at home. The DVDs utilized firm personnel as actors in humorous but thought-provoking skits. The DVDs were shown at firm functions and posted on the firm website.

Merging wellness health initiatives with green initiatives, such as firm support of a local bike ride for charity, resulting in fewer visits to the doctor and possibly lower firm insurance premiums.

Reusing/repurposing/recycling litigation/trial binders. One firm instituted a program to reuse as many binders as possible, repurpose those not suitable for firm reuse by sending them to local urban schools, and recycle those no longer in usable condition.

A suggested best practice for a law firm green committee is to include representatives from each occupational group (partners, associates, counselors, paralegals, IT personnel, and legal secretaries). Staff members in particular appreciate being included in a decision-making part of the firm. If your firm has multiple offices, include representatives from each office on the committee and conduct meetings via videoconferencing.

Finally, remember that keeping committee events fun and interesting will increase interest and participation.

Conclusion
“Green” your legal practice and become part of “our common progress” rather than “our common ruin.” Adopting just a few of the ideas discussed above will help protect the Earth and improve your bottom line as well.

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Endnotes
1The quotation is attributed to Barbara Ward, economist and author.

2ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge WasteWise Program FAQ, referencing an Arnold & Porter informal study of eight law firms of various sizes (small to large) and locations.

3Squire Sanders (US) LLP (now Squire Patton Boggs) reported the statistics for savings at its office in Cleveland, Ohio.

4The ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge and the ABA SEER Sustainability Framework for Law Organizations are national bar programs. The Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyers Eco-Challenge and Oregon Bar Association Sustainability Future Section are examples of state bar programs.

5See www.clemetrobar.org/committees/green_initiative/green_initiative_committee/ for information regarding the CMBA’s Green Initiative Committee.

6The CMBA Green Certification criteria are as follows:
A.) Use paper responsibly. Firm must comply with two of the following four criteria:
1. Purchasing office paper with at least 30% recycled content.
2. Using double-sided copying and printing, at least for drafts and internal documents.
3. Recycling discarded office paper.
4. Purchasing office paper only from paper manufacturers with sustainable forestry management practices.

B.) Reduce office energy use by 10 percent in the first year of certification (the CMBA website provides an exhaustive list of tips for accomplishing this criterion).

C.) Create a firm program for recycling glass, plastic, and e-waste products (toner cartridges, computers, etc.).

D.) Create a firm Green Committee or designated administrator to implement the program, interface with the CMBA, and generally encourage environmentally responsible practices among staff members.

7CMBA Green+ Certification requires firms to quantify their successes. Along with the standard recycling and energy savings requirements, the Green+ criteria requires a firm to document another 10% energy savings after its year of initial certification. Considered but not yet part of the Green+ Certification is a green supplier criteria, which requires that firm suppliers meet certain requirements, such as use of recycled materials.

8The event’s full name is the “David Webster Greener Way to Work Day,” named in honor of a CMBA officer who served on the CMBA Green Initiative Committee.

9The Green Innovation Award is one such award, which is made of entirely recycled materials by a local artist.

10Doug McWilliams, a Squire Patton Boggs partner and former CMBA Green Initiative chair, is primarily responsible for creation of the Carbon Footprint Calculator.

11For additional information about the Green Computing program, see the CMBA Green Initiative Committee website link, note 5.

12Solo practitioners and small-firm attorneys can designate an attorney as the firm representative, rather than create a committee.

13See www.tuckerellis.com/social_responsibility/green-initiatives for information about the Tucker Ellis LLP Green Initiative Committee.