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LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT

Keen on Green?

Five firms talk about how they did something about it.

Beveridge & Diamond

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The author is a shareholder in the firm's New York office, serves on its management committee and chairs its green team committee.

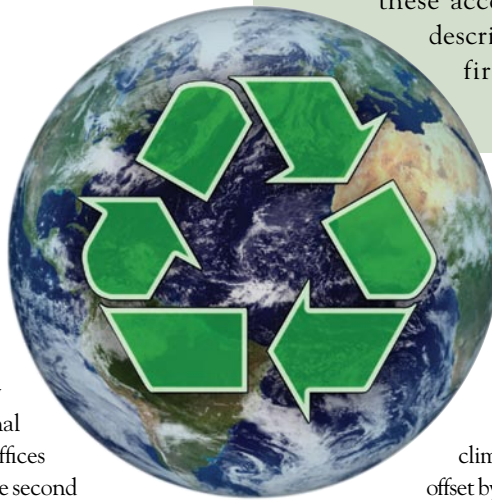
SINCE ITS FOUNDING in 1974, Beveridge & Diamond (B&D) has concentrated its practice in all areas of environmental law and litigation. It was only natural, therefore, that the firm would take a leadership role in the emerging field of sustainability for law office management.

B&D's efforts in this arena developed simultaneously along two separate tracks. The first involved our internal initiative to examine the environmental impact of our offices and improve the firm's environmental sustainability. The second involved the efforts of two B&D attorneys to help develop and implement the ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge, a joint effort of the American Bar Association and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

B&D's internal sustainability efforts began in earnest as part of its 2006 year-end review process, which elicits input from each firm shareholder regarding management issues. During that process, a number of shareholders suggested that B&D undertake an initiative designed to improve the firm's environmental sustainability.

As a result, in early 2007, the management committee approved the formation of the green team committee, which consists of at least one representative from each of our seven offices, includes attorneys, paralegals and administrative staff members, and is chaired by a member of the management committee.

Meanwhile, B&D shareholder David Friedland, who chairs the ABA Environment Section's Committee on Air Quality, had been working with the ABA and EPA to develop an environmental sustainability program geared towards law offices. Mr. Friedland, with the assistance of B&D associate Daniel Eisenberg, helped adapt three EPA programs—Green Power, WasteWise and Energy Star—to create the ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge. The three programs are designed, respectively, to increase the use of renewable energy; promote recycling, recycled paper purchasing and waste minimization; and increase energy conservation.



Much is being written and discussed and legislated about climate change, a/k/a global warming. Buzzwords are thrown around like sustainability and carbon footprints and offsets and renewable energy. The ABA has a Law Office Climate Challenge program “to encourage law offices to take simple, practical steps to become better environmental and energy stewards.” See www.abanet.org/environ/climatechallenge/home.shtml.

In order to provide guidance from those that have been there and tried that, we present here articles from five firms that have instituted some type of “green” measures as management initiatives (presented in alphabetical order by firm name).

While we necessarily set strict limits on the length of these accounts, we hope the experiences as briefly described below illuminate the process that law firms can follow to become more “green.”

—The Editors

The firm's green team committee became active around the same time that ABA and EPA formally initiated the climate challenge. As its first task, the green team evaluated the firm's practices in the areas covered by the climate challenge and analyzed the costs of attempting to meet the targets set by the challenge.

The analysis showed that the firm could participate in the climate challenge cost-effectively, as many of the costs would be offset by increases in efficiency (e.g., through reduced consumption of paper and electricity). As a result, on June 8, 2007, B&D became the first law firm to commit to all three climate challenge programs, and the first to do so for all of its offices nationwide.

The changes B&D has implemented include increasing its recycled paper purchases; expanding the availability of recycling; making double-sided printing and copying the default for drafts and internal documents; replacing light fixtures and appliances with more energy-efficient units; purchasing only Energy Star-certified computer equipment; programming computers, monitors and printers to enter “sleep” mode after 30 minutes of inactivity; shutting down computer equipment at the end of each work day; and committing to purchase renewable energy in an amount equivalent to 60 percent of the firm's electricity usage nationwide.

B&D's experience shows that law firms can make important improvements in environmental performance without incurring substantial new costs.

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