

Law Firm Network Is Striving To Make It Easier To Be Green

By Mary Pat Gallagher

A group of law firms across the country has launched a nonprofit organization to devise and promote ways to "green" the practice of law.

The Law Firm Sustainability Network, incorporated last November, says in its mission statement that its goal is to establish environmental sustainability "as a key component of our professional responsibility to deliver excellent service to clients."

The roughly 50 firms involved have been working to promote that goal since 2011, holding webinars, developing best practices and partnering with sister groups in other countries to share ideas, network and develop guidelines and industry standards.

Examples are using recycled paper and making sure it gets recycled again; buying carbon offsets against their air travel; replacing travel with video-conferencing; replacing light fixtures and setting thermostats higher or lower, depending on the season.

The participating firms so far tend to be larger ones, such as Blank Rome, Drinker Biddle & Reath, K&L Gates, Nixon Peabody, Shearman & Sterling and White & Case.

Network president Peter Masaitis, of Alston & Bird in Los Angeles, one of the founding firms, says many businesses were already taking steps toward sustainability but "we wanted to target the legal industry because there are some issues unique to law firms that are not addressed by any existing group."

Unlike many businesses, law firms do not have to deal with manufacturing processes and supply chains, he points out. Their concerns tend to involve areas like travel, office environment and the efficient use of paper and energy.

Network secretary Daniel Krainin of New York's Beveridge & Diamond, an environmental law boutique, says another impetus is that many lawyers have been counseling clients on how to reduce their environmental impact and make their businesses sustainable. "Lawyers have been talking the talk with clients," he says. "Now there is an effort to allow them to walk the walk."

Krainin points to two major network initiatives that are under way.

Members are being surveyed on their current practices and a statistical analysis of answers, meant to create a benchmark, is expected to be released by the end of this year.

Next year, the network plans to issue American Legal Industry Sustainability Standards, a self-assessment tool by which firms can measure how well they are doing on achieving sustainability.

Krainin calls ALISS the law-firm equivalent of the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards used to grade buildings on their environmental friendliness.

As with LEED, ALISS will feature gold and silver-type rankings, he says.

The network has been holding webinars and conference calls. A recent topic of discussion was teaming up with clients on environmental efforts such as tree planting in the community and setting up programs in local schools.

Masaitis recalls a session on the use of recycled paper. Several paper manufacturers were on the line to answer questions, some of which dealt with whether recycled sheets would cause printer problems.

An upcoming one will focus on reducing energy use through "lighting retrofits," which Masaitis says can often be done at little or no cost with the help of rebates and incentives.

Thus far, all contact has been by phone and over the Internet but Krainin says the goal is to hold an annual conference.

Masaitis says the network's organizing effort was not aimed at big firms but those were the ones that tended to have internal green or sustainability programs, making it easier to reach out to them, with the result that larger firms tended to join first.

Masaitis is national chairman of Alston & Bird's Sustainability Committee, which works to reduce the firm's impact on the environment and promote the health and wellness of those who work for the firm as well as that of the local community and the planet as a whole.

Similarly, Krainin is a founding member and chairman of Beveridge & Diamond's "Green Team."

The network, however, is open to all sizes and also to in-house legal departments.

Members must complete the survey and pay an annual fee, based on firm size, which ranges from \$850 for those with fewer than 300 lawyers



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to \$1,600 for those with 1,500 or more.

They are also asked to designate a point person and to contribute, within the first three months, a case study on any aspect of their sustainability program with a second case study expected within the year.

One case study provided by Morrison & Foerster discussed its successful effort to reduce paper use by shifting to double-sided printing and copying for more than 50 percent of its usage.

Members have access to each other's case studies online and sometimes discuss them via conference calls so they can learn from each other's experiences.

The network, which has had organizational help from ecoAnalyze, a New York environmental consulting firm for the legal profession, has 25 official dues-paying members, with more expected as a result of the formal launch.

Krainin points out that the network is not the first organized environmental campaign directed at lawyers.

The American Bar Association's Section of Environment, Energy and Resources and the Environmental Protection Agency have partnered since 2007 on a Law Office Climate Challenge, which encourages law offices to take specific steps to conserve energy and resources and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants. The program's 280-plus member firms and groups include many network members.