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GOING GREEN

Local law firms mean business in their efforts to be environmentally conscious.

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Law firms all over the state are going “green” in an effort to reduce their carbon footprints and to

conserve energy and resources.

Some firms are taking big strides — like switching to wind-generated power or purchasing renewable energy credits — while others are go-

ing green in smaller, more subtle ways, like eliminating bottled water, reducing paper usage and encouraging recycling.

Whether they are done by gigantic leaps or baby steps, “going green” initiatives are being embraced by law firm employees.

Fredrikson & Byron attorney Ann Ladd, a member of the firm’s “Aim to Sustain” taskforce, said, “When we launched the program [earlier this summer], we not only had a flurry of e-mails thanking us for focusing on the issues of waste reduction and energy conservation, we also had a number of people who either sent in suggestions for other ways to improve, or who volunteered to help with our work.”

Employees and the leadership at Leonard Street and Deindard in Minneapolis are welcoming the firm’s efforts

to be more environmentally conscious, according to Shirley Fetzich, the firm’s director of facilities and operations and a member of its green initiative committee.

“It’s what we all know is the right thing to do,” she said.

Carbon concerns

Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi took the lead among law firms in the upper Midwest more than a year ago when it announced it was switching to wind-generated electricity to provide 100 percent power for its Minneapolis office.

According to Robins’ COO Patrick Mandile, it was undertaken, in part at least, in response to the American Bar Association-Environmental Protection Agency’s

climate challenge to law firms to take specific steps to conserve energy and resources. (See sidebar.)

“We thought it would be a great opportunity for our firm to become a leader in this,” he explained.

Fredrikson is taking steps to reduce carbon emissions as well, offsetting 100 percent of its power usage through the purchase of renewable energy credits. In terms of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, this is equivalent of removing 367 cars from the road for a year or converting 265 average households to renewable energy for one year.

“Our alternative energy practice group has been expanding rapidly, and taking some of the steps that are part of the Aim to Sustain program, like buying

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Several local law firms have stopped using bottled water

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RECs to offset our energy usage, was just one more way of supporting our clients and the industry,” said Ladd.

Leonard Street formally began its green initiative program several months ago, but for more than a year has been encouraging employees to find environmentally friendly ways to get to work. To encourage bus riding, the firm pays 100 percent of Metropass through Metro Transit, an option utilized by a majority of the firm’s support staff. To encourage bicycling, the firm requested and was granted additional bike storage racks at its building, the Fifth Street Towers.

Recycling

Firms are also getting serious about recycling — using more recycled materials and increasing recycling options.

Leonard Street reports that it has been working with its building owners to step up its recycling and trash efforts through things like:

- Putting recycling cans in every office;
- Adding bins for batteries, cans and bottles to each floor in the copy/coffee rooms; and
- Burning trash rather than dumping it in a landfill.

The firm also has a long-standing tradition of donating unneeded furniture items and electronic equipment — including computers, printers and copy machines — to nonprofit organizations.

“We donate everything we can for reuse,” said Fetzych, adding that items not donated are sold or recycled.

Moreover, the firm uses Xerox Energy Star products that are made of recycled materials, are highly efficient and use comparatively little energy. In addition, its use of multifunction equipment yields a 50 percent reduction in energy use.

Leonard Street reported that its letterhead is 100 percent cotton content and that the firm is testing recycled paper

for use in its printers and copy machines.

Fredrikson has converted its marketing materials to paper stock produced from 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper that is Forest Stewardship Council-certified and manufactured through green power.

Robins has switched *all* of its paper to 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper. The firm is also looking at composting options, improving the use of electrical power within the building and additional recycling options.

“It’s really energized a lot of people because [they] can do things not only here at work, but in their homes. That is one of the objectives — to make an impact,” said Mandile.

Minor changes, major impact

Some changes that may seem minor can actually have a major impact.

For example, many law firms have eliminated bottled water, instead providing pitchers of ice water in conference rooms and at client meetings and events, and installing filters on faucets and coffee makers.

Stacey Rowe, marketing manager and member of Fredrikson’s Aim to Sustain taskforce, said that the firm had been going through 5,000 bottles of water a year. Switching to tap water has not only been good for the environment, it has saved money.

“We’ve been trying to focus in on how this can help the environment but if there is a costs savings we make sure to put that out there as well,” said Rowe.

More efficient use of supplies and cleaning products is another “green” goal. Some firms are switching to bio-degradable silverware and plates that are made from recycled materials.

Leonard Street’s green initiative mandates reusing office supplies like three-ring binders. In addition, all restroom supplies, including tissue, soap and hand tow-

els are made from recyclable materials and cleaning products used by the building staff are earth-friendly.

Educating employees

Educating employees has been a key component of many firms’ green initia-

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TOP 10 ‘GREEN’ TIPS FOR LAW FIRMS

1. REDUCE PAPER USE BY USING TWO-SIDED PRINTERS AND ENCOURAGING ELECTRONIC FAXES.
2. USE ENERGY STAR-RATED ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT.
3. SERVE FILTERED WATER INSTEAD OF BOTTLED WATER.
4. USE CLEANING PRODUCTS THAT ARE FREE OF PHOSPHATES, NITRATES, HARSH CHEMICALS AND CAUSTIC AGENTS THAT DAMAGE NATURAL WATERWAYS.
5. POWER DOWN COMPUTERS AND TURN OUT THE LIGHTS AT THE END OF EACH WORK DAY, OR INSTALL MOTION SENSITIVE SWITCHES.
6. OFFER EMPLOYEES DISCOUNTED MASS-TRANSIT ACCESS, OR REWARDS FOR CAR-POOLING.
7. RECYCLE, REUSE OR REFILL PRINTER CARTRIDGES AND TONERS.
8. JOIN A GROUP SUCH AS THE GREEN POWER PARTNERSHIP, THE EPA’S WASTE WISE OR THE ABA-EPA LAW OFFICE CLIMATE CHALLENGE.
9. CONTRIBUTE PRO BONO HOURS TO ENVIRONMENTAL OR SUSTAINABILITY ORGANIZATIONS.
10. RECYCLE PAPER, CANS, BOTTLES, BATTERIES AND E-WASTE SUCH AS OLD COMPUTERS, MONITORS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS; AND REUSE/RECYCLE OFFICE SUPPLIES SUCH AS FILE FOLDERS, RED-ROPE FOLDERS AND EXHIBIT TABS.

tives.

“A lot of what we figured out we needed to do was educate people, both on what they do in the office and what they do at home,” said Fetzich.

Fredrikson’s Aim to Sustain Taskforce members agreed, explaining that their program is not only a long-term strategy for reducing carbon emissions, it’s an attempt to educate firm members to apply sustainability principles to their work and home lives and create awareness with business partners and clients.

To that end, the taskforce has been providing tips and training, including organizing contests encouraging employ-

ees to do things like save energy by turning off lights and powering down computers at the end of the day. It has also asked employee to reduce paper waste by “thinking before printing” e-mails. It has also posted stickers in offices to promote recycling.

“We are really trying to ... get buy-in from our firm members,” Rowe explained.

And it seems to be working; the firm recently hosted a seminar titled “Aim To Sustain: What You Can Do,” which attracted more than 80 people.


Robins Kaplan recently held its first annual “Going Green” fair, in which a handful of speakers discussed ways employees can be more earth friendly. The firm invit-

ed other tenants from its building to the event as well.

Fredrikson is putting together a “toolkit” of available resources.

“We hope to make that toolkit available to clients and other law firms — to help shorten their paths to waste reduction and energy conservation,” said Ladd.

Fredrikson is also planning an internal “green product fair” for the spring, around Earth Day, and will continue to work with its building owner and manager to reduce its electricity usage.

“Let’s just say that we have plenty of ideas to keep us busy for quite a while,” Ladd said. 

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