

LAWYERS JOURNAL

YLD's Practicing Green Initiative offers program on reducing paper in the office

By Rachel Rosnick

Sick of lugging heavy boxes of client files around? Ever get home only to realize that you left an important file at the office? Does an office free of clutter sound too good to be true? One solution to these common headaches is the paperless (or the more common "paperlight") office – not only does it save your law practice money, it also reduces your practice's environmental impact.

The concept of a paperless office was first popularized by *Business Week* in a 1975 article, "The Office of the Future." Although some of the article's predictions have come true, paper usage has actually increased by 400 percent since the article's publication more than 40 years ago. As predicted by the article, the modern office is centered around the computer, though the desk on which it sits overflows with a variety of paper documents – such as mail, notepads and meeting agendas – and the office, itself, often is organized around a large printer-copier. According to Statistic Brain Research Institute data, 9.125 billion tons of paper is used in the United States each year, with 4 billion trees being cut down annually for paper use. The average office worker uses approximately 10,000 sheets of paper annually – 45 percent of which ends up in the trash can.

Despite the growing prevalence of e-filing and the popularity of electronic research databases such as LexisNexis and Westlaw, law firms are even worse offenders. A 2008 study by Arnold & Porter found that the typical lawyer uses between 20,000 and 100,000 sheets of copy paper a year, a staggering average of between 10 and 50 sheets per hour. At an average cost of eight cents per page, this over-reliance on paper costs a law practice between \$1,600 and \$8,000 a year per attorney while contributing up to 4.5 tons of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the environment.

To help combat this trend, the newly revived Practicing Green Initiative of the Young Lawyers Division Public Service Committee held a Lunch and Learn in December with representatives from Sustainable Pittsburgh to learn about the Sustainable Pittsburgh Challenge. Through this challenge, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, municipalities and universities engage in friendly yearlong competition to earn points by completing one of more than 250 sustainability actions. Although dozens of organizations in Allegheny County are participating in the Challenge, none is a law firm.

As part of their continued effort to change this, the Practicing Green Initiative is offering "So You Want a Paperless Office? Ethical Considerations and Practical Tips"



Electronics recycling drive

For those looking to also downsize the amount of obsolete or malfunctioning electronics around the office or at home, the Practicing Green Initiative has organized an electronics recycling drive for items such as a/v equipment, computers and monitors, and ink and toner cartridges. Small, easily transportable items can be taken to Frank, Gale, Bails, Murcko, & Pocrass, P.C. (email gordon@fgbmp.com) or Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP (email sshort@schnader.com) from Friday, April 13, through Monday, April 30. To recycle large items, email Jacob Metz at JMetz@evolutionecycling.com.

with Jonathan Skowron of Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP and Marlene van Es of Trellis Legal, LLC on Friday, April 20. The CLE will provide an overview of the ethical issues associated with paperless electronic resources and offer practical tips for reducing a practice's paper use. According to Skowron, modifying a law practice to be environmentally friendly generally involves an increased emphasis on paperless office techniques, such as the use of cloud storage and digital files whenever possible. When paper copies are required, attorneys can use recycled copy paper, utilize smaller fonts and set their office printers' default to double-sided.

In addition to reducing a practice's environmental impact while saving money, paperless technology can streamline an office, resulting in efficiency and productivity benefits and, as van Es adds, enables attorneys to better serve their clients through more-direct communication. Access to accessible-from-anywhere electronically stored files allows for increased productivity when away from the office, which is crucial for those who work from home or while traveling. Shared cloud storage increases opportunities for collaboration by allowing multiple users to make edits to the same document from multiple locations without the hassle of reconciling multiple individual drafts.

While committing to use less paper has environmental, financial and practical benefits, it does come with some additional responsibilities and ethical hurdles. Attorneys must take measures to ensure that all digital files are backed up and securely stored, and they should consider using encrypted email or enabling two-step verification for sensitive communications. Attorneys also should be mindful of each court's individual rules regarding electronic filing, service and signatures, as well as each judge's rules or personal preferences regarding double-sided copies. ■

What: So You Want a Paperless Office? Ethical Considerations and Practical Tips

When: April 20, noon - 1 p.m.

Where: E.P. Mellon Room of the Koppers Building

CLE credit: 1 Ethics

Details: www.ACBA.org.

Earth Day weekend

Looking to do more? The Practicing Green Initiative and the Pittsburgh Parks Department have teamed up for a morning of tree planting, invasive plant removal and other landscape improvements on Saturday, April 21, from 8 to 11 a.m. at Frick Park. The event is family friendly; food and T-shirts will be provided. To sign-up, email Jaclyn Belczyk at jbelczyk@gmail.com.