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Easy being green

Region's law firms enhance efforts to reduce impact on environment

By **ARIELLE KASS**

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Some people do it for altruistic reasons. Others for economic ones. Still more because doing something for the environment looks good to clients.

Irrespective of the rationale, though, attorneys say the result of law firms increasing their sustainability efforts is the same. And it's all good.

"Regardless of the motivation, the efforts have a beneficial impact," said Doug McWilliams, a partner in the environmental, health and safety section at Squire, Sanders & Dempsey. "It's easier to gain a consensus on a path forward if you're not concerned about what the motivations are."

Mr. McWilliams said at his firm, reducing the amount of paper used or becoming more energy efficient is important to different people for different reasons. But the result at Squire Sanders and elsewhere is similar in that it means more firms and clients are paying attention to the environmental impact of the work they do and how they can reduce that impact.

The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association started a program last year to certify firms that have taken steps to go green, and since then, it has had more than 40 law firms and law departments qualify for the process. While the CMBA does not double-check efforts, it does ask firms to state they are meeting certain criteria, including a commitment to reduce total office energy by 10% in the coming year.

Carter Strang, the chair of the green initiative committee at the CMBA and a partner in the energy and environmental law practice at Tucker Ellis & West, said he saw the need to push a green initiative at his firm and more broadly after noticing a large disparity in what people were doing.

"I began to check around to what firms had in place already," he said. "Some were on the ball, but others were doing nothing."

Walk the walk

Mr. Strang said he used Tucker Ellis to test ideas for the larger CMBA program, which he hopes will continue to evolve and improve over the years. He wanted to avoid setting the bar too high at the start, he said, to ensure there would be significant buy-in.

"This allows firms and lawyers the opportunity to show they're doing something," Mr. Strang said. "Lawyers make good leaders. This is something where we need to show some leadership."

Already, he said, Tucker Ellis attorneys are using 15% less paper per person. He said there are no figures on savings across the CMBA.

Dave Nash, a partner at McMahon DeGulis LLP, said the environmental law firm was one of the first 10 firms in the country to pilot an American Bar Association sustainability program and it has been certified by the CMBA. Recycling waste paper by printing on two sides saves more than \$4,000 a year alone, Mr. Nash said.

He said that when a firm makes the decision to be more sustainable, it's about more than going green — it's about doing the right thing. Especially at an environmental firm.

"We've got to walk the walk, too, we can't just talk the talk," he said. "We have a responsibility to be responsible."

Mr. Nash emphasized, too, that the expectations on lawyers to go green shouldn't differ at all from other white-collar workers, saying attorneys should not face either a higher or lower standard. He suggested that the high ethical standard a lawyer is expected to live up to should also extend to sustainability.

Little things, big difference

At Hahn Loeser & Parks, Alan Kopit, partner in charge of the Cleveland office, said that firm's green efforts really began in June 2008, when the firm moved its offices. Then, they replaced paper products with glass, used primarily recycled paper and made light fixtures energy sensitive.

While Mr. Kopit said the firm likely would have done such things eventually, the move to a new space was a good opportunity to kick off a new program.

And Mr. Kopit said the changes have made for a more pleasant corporate environment. "It just seems more civilized to drink a cup of coffee out of a glass mug instead of Styrofoam," he said.

And while Mr. Kopit said law firms don't have the same environmental impact that a manufacturer might, they still do things that impact the environment.

Alvidas Jasin, director of business development and chair of the Think Green Initiative at Thompson Hine, said the legal industry is the largest consumer of paper outside of publishing.

Mr. Jasin said one of the key changes his firm made was to reduce the amount of paper used, and reuse paper whenever possible. The firm also has a "freecycle" board where employees can give items to their co-workers instead of throwing them away, it encourages ride sharing and shares best practices across the country as other law departments seek ways to become greener.

Selling point

Thompson Hine founded a climate change and sustainable business solutions practice group about two years ago, co-chair Andrew Kolesar said. Mr. Kolesar, who is also the leader of the firm's environmental practice group, said more clients are starting to pay attention to sustainability.

While clients ultimately make their decisions based on the lawyers that would represent them in a matter, he said there are clients who care about what firms are doing internally and they appreciate expertise in a particular area.

While Mr. Kolesar said he expects more companies to begin focusing on sustainability, it has not yet translated into a question when companies request proposals from law firms about possible work. Mr. Jasin, though, said he has begun to see the question about a firm's sustainable practice "more often."

"We know it's top of mind with a lot of clients and we want to make sure we're addressing that," he said.

Mr. McWilliams, at Squire Sanders, said European clients are more interested in knowing the law firm's carbon footprint — and that of the work done for them — than American or other clients are. He said that question has led Squire Sanders to calculate that footprint then, naturally, to work to reduce it.

"It's important to different people for different reasons," he said. "Some of us advocate for this on the basis of our responsibility as people and as stewards to reduce our impact. ... It also reduces cost, so it's an easy sell."



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