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Lawyers push for energy conservation

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By Peter Reuell, Daily News staff GHS Sun Jan 13, 2008, 12:10 AM EST

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David White Jr. doesn't fit the mold of an environmentalist.

An attorney and partner in the Boston firm of Breakstone, White and Gluck, White is more comfortable in a suit and tie than tie-dye.

Before joining the Massachusetts bar, however, White was a student at the University of Vermont, where he received a degree in environmental studies.

Research Group.

Now the president of the Massachusetts Bar Association, White is putting his environmental pedigree to use, leading the industry group in a push to encourage lawyers to be more environmentally friendly.

Called the Lawyers Eco Challenge, the program urges lawyers to sign an "environmental pledge" to take steps to implement a set of green guidelines drafted by the association.

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"It's not a whimsy, it's a real concern," White said this week, of promoting "green lawyers." "The why of it is we all have a duty to fight global warming and protecting environmental resources, and one way we can definitely do that is by reducing our energy usage."

Taking even simple steps to reduce energy usage, like turning off lights or installing motion-activated lights in law offices, turning off computers and other electronics, reducing paper use and increasing recycling, White said, can have dramatic impacts.

[Read more about green guidelines](#)

"What we've done in my office is...we took out all incandescent bulbs and replaced them with compact fluorescents," White said. "We put the common areas on motion sensors, and we've just adopted good habits about turning off equipment that's not being used."

Those few steps, he said, combined with a plan to replace traditional fluorescent bulbs with the super-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs should cut the firm's energy use by as much as 25 percent.

"I'm pretty confident most firms around the state can do the same thing," he said. "We want to be an example for other businesses around the state. If lawyers can do it, accountants can do it, and insurance people can do it."

White's sentiment already seems to be catching on.

Barely a day after the Eco Challenge campaign was unveiled this week, more than two dozens lawyers and law firms had signed the online pledge. By week's end, more than 30 had signed up.

"My desire to go green started with my daughter" Rachel, said Alan Klevan, of the Wellesley firm Klevan and Klevan. "She's in middle school, and over the past several months she's become very environmentally conscious."

Spurred by his daughter and his work with the MBA's Law Practice Management Section, Klevan uses technology like document scanners to cut back on the amount of paper his office uses.

"I personally believe I'm 50 to 60 percent there," he said, of his goal of a paperless office. "Lawyers have been so focused on their practice of law and doing right by their clients, they're not understanding the idea that there's other means out there to represent their clients as efficiently, if not better."

Even for lawyers who already consider themselves "green," the guidelines have been eye-opening.

"I've gotten all kinds of new ideas from this group," Sudbury attorney Susan Crane, who served on the MBA task force which helped draw up the guidelines, said this week.

"I've done a whole lot, but I could always do more, and I think we all could," she added. "A lot of lawyers focus on the environment and energy - this seemed like something we should be doing so our clients can model our behavior, and send a message out there that we're all trying."

"Lawyers need to be doing this. We can't just be taking on causes for others and forget what we're doing ourselves."

"For us, it was something that made a lot of sense, because it makes a good statement," said Tim Borchers, senior partner at Borchers, Ware and Guglielmo, which has offices in Medway and Franklin. "Every profession

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ought to have some kind of commitment to cutting back on the use of resources."

Like Klevan, Borchers is exploring the notion of the paperless office, and said the firm may purchase equipment and software to help cut back on paper usage.

"In our business, paper is king," he said. "We do a lot of printing. One thing we're actually studying right now is the impact of printing on both sides of the paper."

The firm has also urged employees to turn computer monitors off at night, switches to energy saving light bulbs and is upgrading its office to use programmable thermostats.

The idea of the challenge, though, isn't to mandate lawyers or law firms follow the MBA's strict rules on environmental awareness.

"It's more about planning," said Nancy Reiner, who co-chaired the task force. "The idea is just to get people and lawyers and law firms thinking about it.

"When you have a can, don't just throw it in the garbage. If we all, if a lot of firms do work to save energy, then it will have an impact."

"It's very exciting," said Philip Warburg, president of the Conservation Law Foundation, the MBA's partner in the Eco Challenge, of the commitment from lawyers and law firms. "I think that we are encouraging leaders in the Massachusetts professional community to walk the walk about climate change and other environmental practices they can show leadership on.

"It's a process of both thinking differently, and acting differently. We're not asking people to somehow reduce their efficiency on the job, or cutting into their profit margin. It's simply saying here are responsible choices you can make that can help us address a problem we can no longer afford to ignore."

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