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Opinion 1: Barristers Lead Push For Efficient Bulbs

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Monday, 07 January 2008
By David White Jr.
Special to the Worcester Business Journal



How green is your lawyer?

That, I believe, is a question that will be asked more and more as our consciousness about global warming, greenhouse gasses, and the need for resource conservation continues to spread throughout Massachusetts and across the country.

Lawyers are now stepping forward, working to make a difference in both energy conservation and other environmental concerns. Most of the changes are simple, a few require some investment and all have short payback periods and significant impacts.

Legal Lights

At the Massachusetts Bar Association, we are urging all of our members (and, of course, other lawyers throughout the commonwealth) to become leaders in this area, and to make the practice of law the most energy efficient business in the commonwealth by participating in the MBA Lawyers Eco-Challenge. The response to this initiative is already extremely favorable.

The first changes require simple changes of habit. Lights should be shut off in offices and conference rooms that are not occupied.

Computers should be shut down at night, and should be programmed to enter energy-savings modes when idle for more than 15 minutes. Other office equipment should be shut off at night as well.

The next step requires a few dollars. Incandescent bulbs should all be changed to compact fluorescents, which use about one-fifth the energy for the same light output. Motion sensing switches should be placed in those rooms which are occupied sporadically; the lights turn on and off automatically. Older fluorescent fixtures (the ones with the fatter light bulbs) should be replaced with newer fixtures which use one third less energy. The costs for most of these fixtures are very low, and payback in energy savings comes after only a couple of years.

Finally, on the energy front, each new piece of equipment should be the most energy

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efficient in its class. We are not advocating the replacement of every computer, copier, and refrigerator, but as this equipment wears out or is replaced, Energy Star compliant equipment is what should be purchased.

Watt Reduction

So, what is the savings? I am halfway through the changes I am suggesting, and our electric bill has already dropped by 10 percent. Others who are a little farther along report immediate savings of over 25 percent. Multiplied across the entire legal industry, that is an enormous savings, and new technologies will no doubt bring even more savings.

The other major area where lawyers can have an impact is in their use of paper. It is estimated that the average lawyer uses a ton of paper each year (and there are roughly 50,000 lawyers in Massachusetts). It is important that as much of that paper be from recycled products, which are only slightly more expensive, and that all paper used in the office is recycled. For law firms that are tenants in larger buildings, this may mean urging the landlord to make changes throughout the building.

The MBA will be publishing its Green Guidelines for lawyers this month. Lawyers will also be asked to sign a pledge promising to implement the guidelines as best they can. All lawyers are encouraged to take the challenge, and everyone is welcome to watch the progress on our web site, www.massbar.org/ecochallenge.

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