

The greening of law firms

Going green means more than driving a hybrid or changing light bulbs

Anayat Durrani

Northern California law firms are seeing green. No, not the dollar kind. Law firms are increasingly taking steps toward operating in an environmentally sustainable way.

Oakland-based Wendel, Rosen, Black & Dean LLP is a green pioneer. In July 2003, it became the first law firm in the country to be certified as a "Green Business" by the Bay Area Green Business Program.

"We hired a young, eager construction attorney who believes that the best way to change the world is to work within the business world, making sustainability and *green* a social and business imperative. He found like-minded attorneys in two of our partners. They approached us with the idea," explained Gina Maciula, executive director at the firm.

It also helped that one of their clients, Clif Bar, a leading energy bar and drink company, encouraged them based on their interest in working with a firm that shared their values. The year that Wendel Rosen went *green,* they also launched their Green Business Practice Group that advises a range of clients committed to sustainable business practices. In April 2007, the firm announced their second certification as a *green* business.

The changes made include using all "Energy Star" electronics; working with building on waste separation and recycling programs; placing purchasing preferences to items with high recycled content; converting many internal memos and reports to e-mail versions; and setting default copying procedure for double-sided whenever possible.

The paper trail

But the paper, what about all the paper law firms use? They use products with only 100 percent post-consumer waste content and chlorine-free recycled paper. They use soy-based inks in professional print projects, and they encourage electronic transmission of documents. The firm said their efforts combined save more than 250 trees, 40,000 pounds of greenhouse gases and 31, 450 kilowatts of electricity per year. After audits by PG&E, the East Bay Area Municipal Utility District and the city of Oakland and Alameda County, Wendel Rosen, in fact, exceeds the requirements by the Bay Area Green Business Program. "Our greening has been very successful," said Maciula.

Following the leader

Other law firms have followed. In September 2006, Farella Braun and Martel announced its certification as a Green Business by the Bay Area Green Business Program. It is San Francisco's first *green* major law firm. The firm recently launched a new advertisement campaign with its slogan as "The New Hybrid."

"We felt that the new campaign embodies who we are – the cross between a big firm and a small firm. We also are a certified *green* firm," said David Bruns, Director of Marketing, Farella Braun and Martel, which has integrated their *green* efforts department-wide.

Going *green* means the firm has addressed recycling and waste reduction, energy and natural resource conservation, pollution prevention and quantification of their greenhouse gas emissions. Farella Braun and Martel said their efforts have diverted almost two tons of material from landfills since put into place.

In October 2007, Fenwick & West LLP became the first law firm certified by Santa Clara County as an environmentally sustainable "Green Business." They also established a "Green Team" made up of attorneys and staff to oversee their *green* efforts. But, their desire to go *green* had earlier roots.

"Back in 2000 when we were researching the new location for the firm's headquarters, driving forces for relocating to Mountain View were the city's existing *green* efforts, the proximity to many of our clients and employees, and the accessibility of public transportation," said Julie O'Loughlin, Senior Director of Operations/Facilities at Fenwick & West.

They worked with the building owners to save historical trees, install low water landscaping, showers and bike cages. In addition, the design of the building and interior allows them maximum use of natural and shared light from the outside and fresh air through operable windows.

"We exceeded California's state Title 24 energy standards by utilizing energy efficient lighting in our buildings as well as reduced lighting in our parking garage; we use recycled content ceiling and carpet products wherever possible, and installed low flow faucets and toilets. All faucets and lighting have sensors for additional reduction in water and energy use," added O'Loughlin.

Katovich Law Group made a commitment to go *green* beginning in late 2005. Since Katovich operated as a 'virtual' law firm, one having no centralized office structure, it required they go the extra mile.

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"This meant that each individual, no matter where they worked, office or home, would need to get green-certified before the entire firm could attain that designation from the Alameda, San Francisco and Contra Costa counties," said John Katovich, founder. "We felt that we were providing an even stronger commitment by having that many locations audited and certified."

Costs of going *green*

But what are the costs of going *green*? O'Loughlin said going *green* has helped save money with their operational costs over the last five years. And, the benefits? She said, in many ways it has helped "retain employees and contribute to many of our clients choosing us over our competition."

Wendel Rosen's Maciula said at the operational level their costs have remained steady. She, too, notes the benefit it has had in recruiting and in employee morale.

"People like working for firms that are socially aware," added Maciula.

Maciula said that the firm's original goal was to influence the entire legal community. It seems it has succeeded. In fact, Wendel Rosen frequently shares their story with other law firms and businesses looking to go *green*.

Katovich said other firms could and should go *green*. It requires a commitment from the head of the firm down through the entire organization to act environmentally responsible. However, acting responsibly does not end with changing light bulbs and recycling, he said, but rather looking at one's entire way of living and how it impacts others.

"If we ignored our impact on the planet while focusing only on our practice or ourselves, we would be setting a poor example and would be doing additional harm," said Katovich. "By acknowledging and adhering to, what is now an easy approach to living more responsibly and sustainably, we sleep much better."

Anayat Durrani is an L.A.-based international freelance journalist with 10 years of professional experience. She is a versatile writer who has been widely published worldwide in magazines, newspapers, journals, and online. She holds a Masters degree in Journalism and International Relations. Some of the publications she has written for include California Lawyer *magazine,* Lawcrossing.com, *Egypt's* Al-Ahram Weekly, Specialty Retail Report *magazine,* P.I. Magazine, 944 Magazine *and many others.*


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