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It is easy being green

Rice Law answers the nationwide call to reduce environmental waste

3 December 2009 — Wilmington, NC — Rice Law, PLLC is an early implementer of green business practices and is one of the first two law firms in Wilmington, NC to go green.

“It’s the right thing to do,” said Williams. “We have been slowly transforming our office culture toward green initiatives, and our team is excited about the changes.”

There are approximately 20,356 lawyers in North Carolina but only 13 law firms statewide have identified themselves as having implemented green business practices. According to a Washington Post article,¹ the average lawyer uses between 25,000 and 100,000 pages of paper per year, so the impact NC law firms could have on the environment would be significant. Having done the math, NC attorneys use at least 508 million sheets of paper per year!

According to Brandi Cummings, small business author, the average American office worker throws out about 150 pounds of paper per year contributing to the deforestation of the planet and CO² emissions. Rice Law utilizes Cape Fear Courier Services, Inc., a Wilmington courier service, for secure document destruction of all client records and after the paper is shredded, it is recycled.

Rice Law once used about 120,000 sheets of paper (120 pounds) each year. Reducing paper use was an obvious starting point. Many people don’t realize that an original document and four copies of that original make their way out of the courthouse each day in the form of paper. These documents and the copies originate in the attorney’s offices. The Firm started by employing strategies to reduce paper usage by almost one-half by digitizing documents, obtaining printers that print on both sides of the paper, and sending discovery, motions and other pleadings to opposing counsel *via* fax.

Changing to 100% recycled paper, Rice Law estimates the Firm will eliminate 148 pounds of greenhouse gases, save 2 trees, 711 gallons of water and 43 pounds of solid waste per year (according to a web-based calculator from the Environmental Defense Fund).

Rice Law joined the *American Bar Association (ABA) -Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Law Office Climate Change* program designed to encourage law firms to take simple, practical steps to become better stewards of the environment. There are twelve other law firms in the state participating in that program. Rice Law is also one of four law firms in North Carolina that participates in the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Waste-Wise program.

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/02/AR2007060200097.html>

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As a WasteWise member, Rice Law is required to establish three new waste prevention activities, expand or improve current recycling efforts, and purchase and/or manufacture additional products with recycled content. A major thrust of WasteWise is waste prevention—actions that minimize or eliminate the generation of waste before it is created—with the goal of decreasing the amount of material that must be recycled or thrown away.

To that end, some of the initiatives undertaken by Rice Law include:

- Virtual meetings – Allows prospective and existing clients to conference through Skype and Live Meeting without leaving their home or place of employment.
- Virtual Law Office (VLO) – Clients receive copies of all correspondence, pleadings and their file through Rice Law VLO or through email.
- PC power management – Personal computers are set to hibernate when not in use and switched off at night. A Smart Power Strip turns off all other peripherals automatically.
- Compact fluorescents – Replaced incandescent lights with CFs. Rice Law recycles the CFs at Home Depot so that mercury does not pollute the landfills.
- Water – Rice Law discontinued bottled water and replaced with a water filter from Aqua Filtration Specialists as well as using low flow faucets.
- Facsimile – All facsimiles are received on a virtual server as .pdf files and are not printed by default.
- Service of Legal Pleadings on opposing parties – Accomplished via fax.
- Digitize! – All emails encourage recipients not to print but to save electronically. When printing drafts for review, print on both sides of the paper.
- Recycled paper – Buy and print on recycled paper with 100% recycled content.
- E-Bills – Clients receive their invoices electronically.
- Eliminate styrofoam/paper waste – Rice Law provides coffee mugs and glasses for employees and clients. Use metal utensils and wash dishes. Rice Law encourages team members to eat meals in the office.
- Recycle and reuse – All aluminum cans, glass, etc. is recycled. Rice Law scans trial notebooks and reuses notebooks and tab dividers for other clients when possible.
- Policies and procedures are communicated electronically. Rice Law eliminated paper telephone messaging.
- Rice Law is a Network Member of the North Carolina Sustainable Business Council.

Everyone knows there is a national movement to adopt environmentally friendly business practices but law firms have been slow to respond. Mark Spencer Williams, the firm's managing member states, "This call for environmental responsibility has certainly been felt by us as we see an increasing number of clients who prefer that we employ sustainable practices."

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About Rice Law, PLLC

Rice Law, PLLC is one of the largest boutique family law firms in Wilmington, North Carolina with three attorneys on staff. Rice Law, PLLC provides legal counsel in the areas of family and education law. Our attorneys provide full-service representation of clients in New Hanover, Pender, Brunswick, and Moore counties. The firm provides online legal services throughout the State of North Carolina through its Virtual Law Office. For more information, visit www.RiceFamilyLaw.com.

About the EPA WasteWise Program

The Environmental Protection Agency's WasteWise program is open to businesses, local governments and non-profit agencies. Since its creation in 1994, more than 2,000 organizations in the U.S. have joined demonstrating their leadership in finding cost-effective ways to reduce waste. WasteWise partners include many of the country's leading manufacturers, retailers, and service firms, spanning more than 50 different industry sectors. More information on WasteWise is available at www.epa.gov/waste/partnerships/wastewise.

About the ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge

The Climate Challenge is designed to encourage law offices to take specific steps to conserve energy and resources, as well as reduce emissions of greenhouse gases—which cause global climate change - and other pollutants. More information is available at www.abanet.org/envIRON/climatechallenge/overview.shtml.

About the Sustainable NC Business Council

The Sustainable NC Business Council is a peer-to-peer network of companies of all sizes and types, as well as organizations working constructively with the business community toward a sustainable economy. More information is available at www.sustainnc.org.