



ABA-EPA Law Office Climate Challenge WasteWise Program

FAQ

1. What is the Problem of Office Paper Waste and How is It Linked to Energy Consumption and Climate Change?

Law offices tend to be paper-intensive. They primarily use large quantities of printer and copier paper, but also use other types of white paper (letterhead, bond, and note paper), colored paper, file folders, and many types of envelopes (including manila envelopes). An informal survey conducted by Arnold & Porter of eight law firms, ranging in size from small to large, in several areas of the country, found that copier/printer paper use alone ranged from about 20,000 to about 100,000 sheets per attorney at those firms during 2006. (This figure does not include additional copying/printing performed for clients by vendors at outside locations, such as trial sites and client locations.) This amount corresponds to about 10-50 sheets per work hour (assuming 2,000 work hours per year). The high end of this range – 100,000 sheets per attorney -- amounts to a half-ton of paper use per attorney per year.

The life-cycle of a ton of paper, from production to recycling, results in the generation of about 9 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) - equivalent greenhouse gas emissions. Disposal in a landfill, in lieu of recycling, results in two more tons of such emissions per year.

Law offices also use large quantities of folders and binders, and they often subscribe to or purchase numerous journals, books, newspapers, and magazines. Paper and paperboard products waste from all sources is a major environmental issue; it comprises 35% — the largest single component — of the municipal waste stream in the U.S. For more information about paper usage and waste management, see U.S. EPA, [Municipal Solid Waste – Paper and Paperboard Products](#) .

As noted above, the production and waste management of paper products consume energy, thereby generating carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions. Production of paper products from virgin sources, i.e., sources other than recycled ones, also consumes trees, a process that both releases CO₂ emissions and reduces the amount of CO₂ that can be sequestered. The paper production process also generates wastewater and waste products, as well as conventional and hazardous emissions to the air and water. See [Paper Task Force Recommendations for Purchasing and Using Environmentally Preferable Paper: Final Report](#) . (The Paper Task Force included representatives from Duke University, Environmental Defense Fund, Johnson & Johnson, McDonald's Corp., The Prudential Insurance Co. of American, and Time, Inc.)

Finally, discarded (that is, nonrecycled) paper products are either (i) incinerated, a process that releases CO₂ emissions and other pollutants, although it may generate usable

energy; or (ii) landfilled, a process that, as the waste decays, releases methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas (although methane may be captured and used).

2. How Can a Law Office Participate in the Law Office Climate Challenge by Adopting Best Practices for Office Paper Management?

A law office can meet the Climate Challenge by adopting simple and practical best practices for office paper management. Specifically, law offices should adopt at least two of the following three best practices:

a. Purchase Office Paper with at least 30% Post-consumer Recycled Content

The first best practice is purchasing paper with recycled content that replaces at least a portion of the virgin source content. Use of recycled content reduces all of the adverse environmental effects noted above associated with paper production.

Currently, U.S. EPA recommends 30% post-consumer recycled content for most types of office paper, including printer and copier paper (as well as bond paper, offset printing paper, note pads, stationery and other writing papers, forms, ledgers, and envelopes). U.S. EPA, [2004 Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines: Buy Recycled Series — Paper Products](#) and [EPA's Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines \(CPG\)](#). Post-consumer recycled content refers to content from paper products recycled after use by consumers (residential or business), and has been established as the standard for recycled content partly to encourage post-consumer recycling.

A law office can meet this best practice by assuring that at least 90 percent of all types of copier, printer, letterhead, and bond paper; as well as envelopes (including manila envelopes) purchased have, in total, at least 30% post-consumer recycled content. As a practical matter, because the great bulk of law office paper is copier and printer paper, a law office can implement this practice simply by adopting a policy to purchase 100% of its copier and printer paper with at least 30% post-consumer recycled content.

b. Recycle Mixed Office Paper

The second best practice for office paper management includes recycling mixed office paper. Mixed office paper includes nearly all waste paper generated in an office, such as white paper (copier, printer, stationery, and notepaper), colored paper, file folders, and envelopes (including manila envelopes). See [WasteWise Tip Sheet: Recycling Collection](#), Feb. 8, 2007.

As a practical matter, a law office can implement this practice by establishing the policy of recycling, providing attorneys and employees convenient access to recycling bins, and providing for centralized collection and transfer to a recycling station.

c. Use Double-sided Copying and Printing

The third best practices for office paper usage, which reduces the amount of office paper consumed, is double-sided copying and printing for all drafts and internal documents, and as many other documents as possible. As a practical matter, a law office can implement this practice by establishing a policy of double-sided copying and printing for all drafts and internal documents of more than several pages in length, implemented as follows:

- (i) Set double-sided copying or printing as the default mode for all copiers and printers that are typically used for documents of more than several pages in length, and which can accommodate double-sided copying or printing;
- (ii) If the law office uses, for documents of more than several pages in length, copiers and printers that cannot perform double-sided copying or printing, establish a policy of making reasonable purchases of software or attachments as needed to enable double-sided copying or printing as the default mode, or establish a policy of replacing those copiers and printers, at the appropriate time, with ones for which double-sided copying or printing can be enabled as the default mode; and
- (iii) Establish a policy of assuring, to a reasonable extent, that any copiers and printers that are typically used for documents of only several pages in length, are equipped for double-sided copying and printing as the default mode.

To enroll in the Climate Challenge by implementing these best practices, the law office should indicate on its Law Office Climate Challenge Application Form that it has adopted these policies (even if it has done so before the establishment of the Climate Challenge), and the ABA will recognize it as a Law Office Climate Challenge Partner. Note that the Climate Challenge is future-looking, so that a law office can enroll at the time that it adopts the specified policies. Note further that a law office does not need to join WasteWise; quantify the amounts of paper saved or recycled or the amount of recycled content in paper increased; or calculate the amount of attendant greenhouse gas emissions avoided.

Although not required as part of the Law Office Climate Challenge, other sensible practices for office paper usage include (i) reviewing documents on-line, rather than printing them out; (ii) providing personnel information on-line instead of through paper; and (iii) distributing paper documents through routing rather than through duplication.

3. How Can a Law Office Participate in the Law Office Climate Challenge by Joining the EPA WasteWise program?

Another way to participate in the Climate Challenge is to join the EPA WasteWise program, implement at least two out of the three best practices for office paper management described above, and quantify both the amount of office paper waste avoided and the amount of attendant greenhouse gas emissions avoided. Law offices that choose this track will be recognized by both the ABA and the EPA WasteWise program, and the amount of their avoided greenhouse gas emissions will be included on the Law Office Climate Challenge Web site.

[WasteWise](#) offers a structured methodology and useful tools and resources – including technical assistance from WasteWise program specialists – that can give law offices practical tips to implement best practices and calculate the effects. Note that organizations may participate in WasteWise by targeting any type of waste, but law offices will receive recognition by the ABA for participating in the Law Office Climate Challenge only if they target office paper waste.

For this purpose, the three best practices for office paper management are the following:

- a. Assure that at least 90 percent of all types of copier, printer, letterhead, and bond paper; as well as envelopes (including manila envelopes) purchased have, in total, at least 30% post-consumer recycled content. A law office can quantify the extent of the increase in recycled content by comparing the quantities and types of the paper it purchases during representative periods before (i.e., during a baseline period) and after changing its policy.
- b. Recycle at least 90 percent of discarded mixed office paper, defined as all types of white paper (copier, printer, letterhead, bond, and note paper), colored paper, file folders, and envelopes (including manila envelopes). A law office can quantify the extent of its increase in recycling by approximating the amount of paper discarded during representative periods before (i.e., during a baseline period) and after changing its policy.
- c. Establish an office-wide policy of double-sided copying and printing for at least 50% of the pages of all internal documents (including drafts). Adherence to this policy may be determined through good faith, practical estimates. As discussed above, such estimates can be based on enabling double-sided copying and printing as the default mode for copiers and printers that are the ones used most often for documents of more than several pages in length, as well as surveys of attorneys and other employees.

The amount of office paper reduction can be quantified in several ways, including:

- Comparing the quantities purchased, on a per-attorney basis, during a baseline period (i.e., before implementation of the double-sided copying/printing policy) and a post-implementation period (although a law office that employs this method should be attentive to any variations in paper usage between the baseline period and the post-implementation period that may result from factors extrinsic to the method of copying

and printing, such as the beginning or completion of an unusually paper-intensive client matter);

- Keeping track of amounts copied and printed by a representative sampling of the law office's attorneys for representative periods of time; or
- For those copiers and printers that keep account of the number of pages copied or printed, reviewing that information.

To participate in WasteWise and the Law Office Climate Challenge, a law office should take the following steps:

Step 1:

The law office joins the WasteWise program by filing a [Partner Registration Form](#). This form is one page and requires little more than generally identifying the waste reduction activities of greatest interest to the organization.

In the case of law offices participating in the Law Office Climate Challenge, that waste will be the types of office paper associated with the best practices described above. Upon filing this registration ([sample](#)), the organization becomes recognized as a WasteWise Partner and listed as such in the WasteWise Membership Listing.

Step 2:

Within two months after registering, the law office must file its first [WasteWise Assessment Form](#). This two-page form, which may be referred to as the "Baseline Assessment form," should indicate goals. For law offices participating in the Law Office Climate Challenge, the goals should include meeting at least two of the three best practices described above.

The Baseline Assessment form ([sample](#)) should also include baseline information for paper use and waste management, including, depending on which goals the law office establishes and how it intends to demonstrate that it has met them: (i) for the goal concerning recycled content, the amount of copier, printer, letterhead, and bond paper; and envelopes purchased, and the amount of same purchased with recycled content; (ii) the amount of mixed office paper discarded and the amount of same recycled; or (iii) the amount of copying and printing paper purchased. Practical methods for making these calculations are briefly described above, and WasteWise offers more information and technical assistance to individual organizations.

The law office files the Baseline Assessment form and EPA reviews it for approval. Once EPA approves it, the law office is allowed to use the WasteWise logo.

Step 3:

At the same time that the law office files its Baseline Assessment form, it should submit to SEER or LPM a Law Office Climate Challenge Application form, and attach a copy of

its Baseline Assessment form. The ABA will then recognize the law office as Law Office Climate Challenge Partner.

Step 4:

The law office should proceed to implement its waste management plan, and then file an annual [WasteWise Assessment Form](#) . WasteWise will advise as to the filing date for this form; according to WasteWise staff, the filing period is generally between the end of January and no later than April 15. This form ([sample](#)) should detail progress in meeting goals over the past year, and establish goals for the next year. The law office may use the same methods for measuring increase in recycled content, increase in recycling, or paper usage reduction due to double-sided copying/printing over the preceding year as the law office used in measuring baseline amounts. The law office should calculate, as described below, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions reductions associated with any increase in recycled content, increase in recycling, or reduction in paper usage due to double-sided copying/printing.

Step 5:

At the same time that the law office submits the WasteWise Annual Assessment form, it should submit to SEER or LPM the Law Office Climate Challenge Annual Update form, and attach a copy of the Annual Assessment form. The ABA will record the amount of greenhouse gas emissions avoided by the law office. In addition, if the law office reports that it has achieved at least two out of the three office paper management best practices described above, the ABA will grant recognition as a Law Office Climate Challenge Leader.

Note that law offices may also apply to WasteWise for [special recognition](#) . In 2005, WasteWise special recognition included (i) Partner of the Year and, in some instances, Honorable Mention, in various categories, including Small, Midsize, and Large Business; and (ii) Gold Achievement Award, and, in some cases, Honorable Mention, for achievement in certain focus areas, including paper reduction.

The Climate Challenge was initiated in March 2007 and is currently scheduled to continue through March 2010..

4. How are the Environmental Benefits Calculated?

The WasteWise program provides detailed information about the impacts on energy usage and climate change from waste management, including office paper waste management. See [WasteWise Climate Campaign](#) .

In particular, to calculate the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions (or energy impacts) associated with a law office's improved office paper management, WasteWise provides two different models, described below, for different activities. A law office may use the models to do the calculations itself at any time. In addition, after the law office submits its Annual Assessment form, WasteWise will provide it with a Climate Profile, which is a report of GHG emissions reductions. Note that another tool allows calculation of other environmental impacts from a reduction in the amount of office paper used or an increase in the amount of recycled content of the office paper, including amounts of wastewater and solid waste generated. See [Web-based Paper Calculator](#) on the Web site of the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, using a paper calculator developed by a citizens' group, Environmental Defense.

One model, the [Waste Reduction Model \(WARM\)](#), compares GHG and energy impacts of landfilling or incineration compared to recycling and to source reduction. Thus, the WARM allows calculation of the amount of GHG emissions reduced by reducing office paper usage or by increasing the amount of office paper recycled. For example, assume that a law office uses one ton (i.e., 2,000 pounds) of office paper and disposes of it in a landfill. The life cycle of that one ton of office paper, from production to landfill, results in GHG emissions in the amount of about 11 tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions. If the law office recycles the one ton of used office paper, instead of landfilling, the office will avoid GHG emissions in the amount of about 2.2 tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions. And if the office reduces its office paper usage by one ton, it will avoid GHG emissions in the amount of about another 8.8 tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions.

The second model, the [Recycled Content tool \(ReCon\)](#) calculates the GHG and energy benefits of increasing the recycled content of office paper. For example, replacing one ton of office paper that has zero recycled content with one ton that has 30% recycled content avoids about 2.2 tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions.

5. What About Other Types of Office Waste Products?

Although for reasons of simplicity and practicality, the focus of the Law Office Climate Challenge is on office paper management, law offices can implement practical and effective best practices to reduce other types of waste, as well. The following are a few examples that cover a range of equipment and materials:

First, for computer equipment purchase and waste management, best practices include (i) purchasing equipment based on environmental attributes; and (ii) at the end of the equipment's useful life, selling, donating, or recycling it. For more information, see U.S. EPA's [Resource Conservation Challenge](#) which is designed to encourage institutional purchasers to evaluate and select desktop computers, notebooks and monitors based on their environmental attributes (a computerized procurement tool, [EPEAT](#), is available to facilitate purchasing computer equipment based on environmental attributes) and the [Plug-in to eCycling](#) program, which promotes reuse and recycling of computer equipment.

Second, law offices can reduce their toner use by using the “draft” or “quick” mode of printing. Standard mode is 1200 dots per inch (dpi), draft or quick mode is 600 dpi, and some law offices report that draft or quick mode does not meaningfully affect print or copy quality. Some law offices that have enrolled in the Climate Challenge have changed the default mode on their printers to draft or quick at the same time that they have changed the default to double-sided printing.

Third, law offices periodically dispose of used furniture, and best practices for such disposal include selling or donating.