

# EASY Solutions

Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore's Green Team has discovered simple ways to "green" its business.

When a team of employees at Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore decided to promote recycling in their offices, they knew there would be some who would resist the change. So they got creative. Instead of asking their workers not to use plastic and Styrofoam products, they simply removed the items from the firm.

"We also eliminated bottled water," says Charles Williams, a senior partner with the firm and a member of the Clean and Green Business Coalition. "At one time we received a tractor-trailer shipment each month — about 150 cases of bottled water. Now we make filtered water available to employees and provide real glasses. We also use real mugs instead of Styrofoam for coffee and hot drinks."

About a year ago, Williams formed a "Green Team" — eight to nine people from all different areas of the firm — to determine specific green practices to implement and identify the best ways to do it. "You can't do everything at once, so you have to start with easy solutions," Williams adds.

Some of the practices implemented over the past year include:

- Recycling paper and aluminum cans, batteries, and toner cartridges;
- Elimination of plastic and Styrofoam cups, plates, and utensils;

- Elimination of bottled water;
- Change in the process for copying and faxing;
- Making reusable materials available to staff.

"The practices we've begun so far have been easy and inexpensive — they cost us less than \$1,000 to implement," says Williams.

As a law firm that generates hundreds of thousands of legal documents, it has been a challenge to persuade staff that everything doesn't have to be a hard copy. Today, the firm has cut down significantly on the transfer of paper by adopting different practices for copying and faxing.

While a tremendous amount of paper was used before, now — as much as possible — the staff faxes electronically and scans documents into a PDF format, instead of photocopying. Employees are encouraged to ask themselves, "Do I need to print this?"

"As much as possible, we are retaining important information by using electronic documents, which ensures there is no risk of losing the information and guarantees faxes are sent," says Brooke Rosen, an attorney with the firm. "It saves time and it's easier to keep track of."

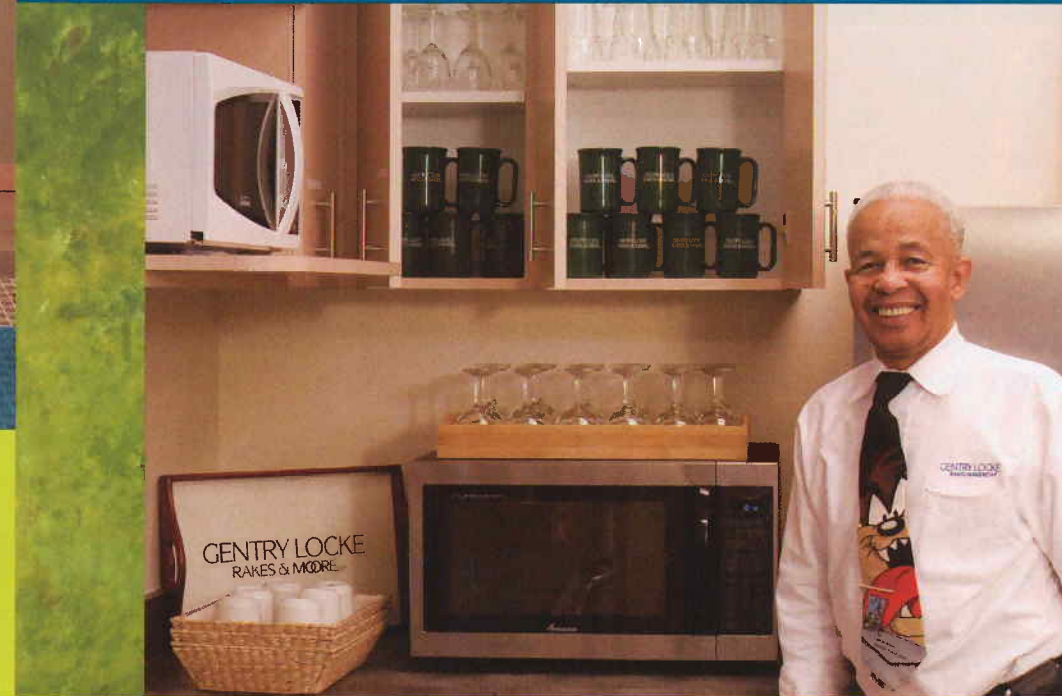
Another effort to be good stewards of the environment is the firm's decision to make reusable materials available to staff such as used legal pads, mailing and interoffice envelopes, binders, and other

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◀ Butch McCoy, runner and "elder statesman" at Gentry Locke, in the break room where reusable glassware has replaced disposable products.

items. These materials are located on shelves in each kitchen area and anyone can pick them up as needed. They also have a supply caddy in each kitchen that contains environmentally friendly cleaning fluids.

While that may seem like a lot of eco-friendly changes, the firm has gone a step further by carefully evaluating and reducing the amount the supplies ordered. "We realized that it is better to eliminate waste than to recycle it. We started looking at the supplies we buy, and decided to only buy what we really need and will use," says Williams. "We found that, in the past, we had bought things and ended up not using them."

But Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore is not settling for the easy fixes when it comes to their commitment to environment. When recently remodeling the third floor of its offices, which are located in the SunTrust building on Franklin Road, the firm saw that project as an opportunity to use environmentally friendly materials in the renovation.

For example, they upgraded the fluorescent lighting, installed eco-friendly carpeting, hung energy-efficient shades on the windows, and improved the heating system to be more energy efficient. Also, all appliances purchased have the Energy Star rating. As other floors are remodeled, the same kinds of materials will be used. In addition, a lot of the furniture purchased for the renovation is made from recycled materials.

Working with Sean McGinnis, who is the director of Virginia Tech's Green Engineering Program, the firm is seeking a way to measure the carbon footprint for its offices. Since the firm doesn't own the SunTrust building, it will take some effort to coordinate with other building tenants to find a method to measure what the firm is doing.

"It is important for our firm to adopt and support good environmental practices because we pride ourselves on being a leader in the community, a good corporate citizen," says Rosen. "Many people who live in Roanoke are here because of the natural beauty. We are taking steps to preserve that beauty because we think our clients prefer to work with a firm that has the same values and priorities as they do."

The next step for the Green Team is to get input from the employees, perhaps through an anonymous survey. Another idea is to have a brown-bag lunch where the team can explain to staff the importance of environmental practices. They also are considering the possibility of a friendly competition — some kind of contest to encourage green practices.

"No one person can correct or reverse the entire environmental situation," says Williams. "But, you've got to start somewhere. That's what we are trying to do." ■