



D I S T R I C T O F C O L U M B I A B A R
Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Section

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Public Statement Supporting the Recycled Paper Initiative

This summer, the District of Columbia Bar Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Section created the Recycled Paper Initiative, a community outreach program designed to address recycling issues in the District of Columbia. Through the Recycled Paper Initiative, the Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Section will propose, and seek endorsements from the legal community supporting, a Petition to local and federal courts in the District to adopt a court rule requiring that standard court submissions (with some exceptions to ease a few perceived hardships) be on recycled paper of government procurement standard or equivalent.

The Recycled Paper Initiative aims to increase recycled paper use within the legal community, in accord with federal and District legislative policies. Despite vigorous promotion of recycling, over 90% of office paper purchased in the United States is still made wholly from virgin materials, thus burying already-brimming municipal landfills under a blanket of missed opportunities. In the District of Columbia, a mandatory office paper collection program and other recycling laws are frustrated in part by listless market demand for recycled-content office paper. Recycling is a two-sided process: waste materials must be collected, but consumers also must buy recycled products in order to “close the loop” – a concept aptly illustrated by the familiar “chasing arrows” recycling logo . The legal community generates millions of tons of waste paper each year, nearly one ton per lawyer. As members of the second largest unified bar in the nation, the legal community of the District of Columbia has a leadership responsibility to help close the recycling loop.

The time is ripe for leadership. Two events have aligned to make recycled paper usage sensible and practical policy. First, a recent study conducted by paper and office machine manufacturers has dispelled old myths about recycled paper, concluding that paper containing 30% postconsumer fiber performs as well as virgin paper. Second, the federal and District of Columbia governments have adopted this 30% postconsumer content standard as an agency procurement mandate, thus providing an easily referenced standard for the private sector and the legal community to follow. As a result, recycled paper is increasingly available, both on the open market and through purchasing cooperatives, at prices comparable to virgin paper. Experts predict that further stimulating recycled paper demand can drive recycled paper prices below traditional virgin paper prices.

A growing number of jurisdictions have adopted court rules requiring recycled paper for court filings. As a result of such rules, lawyers across the country have been introduced to the ease and advantage of recycled paper purchasing and have converted to recycled paper for other office uses. The proposed court rule is a small but significant step that will conserve precious natural resources, avoid millions of dollars in landfill and energy costs, and eliminate tons of pollution. The Recycled Paper Initiative and proposed court rule are detailed in an accompanying report.