

The environmental office

By Eva Scheerlinck

Being environmentally responsible is one of the new challenges facing us in the 21st century. Whether you believe in climate change or not, the pressure as a business to do the right thing by the environment cannot be ignored.

Carbon offset schemes seem to be everywhere. You can offset your carbon impact for almost any purchase, from airline flights to furniture. There are local services for residential energy consumers that give free advice and sometimes even free water-saving devices, or energy-efficient light bulbs. You can have an environmental audit conducted on your business to establish the carbon footprint left behind by the way that you trade. Generation Y are asking employers what initiatives they have in place to save the planet, and your response can feature in their decision as to whether to work for you or not.

The Australian Lawyers Alliance is a varied business. We produce electronic media and hard copy such as this journal; we run events such as conferences and seminars; we employ 12 people at our head office; and we travel in order to support the needs of our Australia-wide membership. And, yes, we are trying to be as environmentally responsible as we can across all these functions.

A 'Green Committee' has been formed among the Lawyers Alliance staff to develop environmentally responsible policies and practices.

Everything we do is under review, from the detergent we use in the staff room, to our air travel. And some things are not as easy as they may seem. For example, some time ago we moved to 100% recycled paper for the photocopier. On closer inspection, however, our recycled paper is a brand that is made in the UK, so any good created by using recycled stock is probably offset as a consequence of freighting it to Australia. It goes to show that being environmentally responsible is not always that easy, and requires more than a cursory attempt to do good.

There are many things that we don't as yet have the answers for. Producing this journal in hard copy format consumes much more energy than it would if we produced it only electronically, online. Putting on conferences requires many people to travel in order to get together. Many such activities leave a carbon footprint, but we also have to realise that it is not always viable (practically or financially) to cut out these practices altogether. So we must combine a certain amount of pragmatism alongside our ever-vigilant attempts to do better by the environment.

The challenge for our members is equally great. The practice of law is still a paper-intensive profession. It is also a profession steeped in tradition. It is slow to change and the paper-less office is still some way off. But paper is not the only area for potential improvement. There are things that



can be done that will make a difference, and will make you feel good, too, such as buying local products. There are also things you can do that will save you money as well, like switching off lights and appliances when they're not being used. So investigate the possibilities, and look closely at the fine print. If not for the environment, do it to attract and retain skilled and motivated employees. ■

Eva Scheerlinck is the Australian Lawyers Alliance's Chief Executive Officer.

PHONE (02) 9258 7700

EMAIL eva@lawyersalliance.com.au

The Lawyers Alliance is looking for a carbon-offset sponsor. If you want to help the Lawyers Alliance to reduce its carbon footprint at conferences, or you know someone who might, contact our Business Development Manager today. Let's build a greener future today.