

Legal eagles emit plenty of hot air

Scott Rochfort
November 11, 2011 - 3:00AM

Just in case you were wondering, the industry body that promotes sustainable practices in the law profession has reported a strong jump in legal-related carbon emissions for the year to June 30.

Overall legal emissions surged 6.2 per cent to 4.77 tonnes per employee, according to a report published by the 28-member Australian Legal Sector Alliance.

"Executive members reported that the primary underlying reasons for this was international merger activity and an increase of national clients," it explained.

The major contributor to the lift in emissions was the increase in air travel. "This increase can be explained, at least in part, by increasing business activity following the global financial crisis," the report said.

The report found that business travel generated 1.69 tonnes of carbon emissions for the average law firm employee working from more than one office, and represented 34 per cent of total legal carbon emissions. This compared with 21.7 per cent in the previous year.

Fortunately, the increased travel did not lead to increased paperwork. The AusLSA report found that its members consumed 115 kilograms of paper per employee, down 7 per cent on the year. The report also made the critical observation: "The differences between recycled and non-recycled paper such as 'whiteness', cost, availability and functionality must, therefore, affect firms in different ways."

The cover of the report had a picture of a slightly-awkward legal type in a pinstripe suit riding a bicycle. He was also breaking the law by not wearing a helmet.

The 32-page report was launched last night at the Sydney offices of Clayton Utz, which for its part emitted 9955 tonnes of carbon emissions and consumed 242 tonnes of paper in the past financial year.

www.smh.com.au at 11 November 2011