

**Oregon State Bar
Sustainable Future Section**

Photo: J. Michael Mattingly

The Long View

The Move to Paperless at the Office of Public Defense Services

By Kathryn Aylward

The Office of Public Defense Services did not set out to establish sustainable practices. Like many state agencies, we were faced with budget cuts that required us to save money wherever we could. As we began to go paperless, it was to save money and become more efficient, but the coda was always “Plus, it’s good for the planet.”

We started by scanning closed files to avoid storage costs. We soon realized that existing files with staples and post-it notes were not scan-friendly. So, we began preparing paper files appropriately for future scanning. Then we moved our office from an 18,000 sq. ft. property to a 14,000 sq. ft. property. Now, there is not even room for storing open paper files.

We redefined “print” to mean print to PDF. As documents are created, they are placed into a PDF file. Yes, we still send paper to our clients, but documents for the file and those sent to the court became PDF documents. This practice dove-tailed perfectly with the move toward e-filing in the Court of Appeals.

At first, some attorneys were resistant to giving up paper. But as soon as we reached critical mass (i.e. the PDF file was larger than the paper file), they began to see the benefits. If an attorney unexpectedly has to stay home because of a sick child or inclement weather, they still have all of their files available at the click of a button, meaning no lost time for the employee or the agency.

Secretaries no longer spend time putting pieces of paper in a file. Attorneys no longer spend time asking secretaries to pull files. All files are available at the click of a button. Many OPDS clients are incarcerated and call collect to speak to their attorney. Having the file immediately available has reduced our collect call charges.

PDF files are searchable so that a 4,000-page transcript is now manageable. An attorney can highlight, bookmark, comment, and cut-and-paste from the transcript electronically.

Attorneys bring their laptops and iPads to team meetings so briefs can be reviewed without printing multiple copies. At oral argument, the entire file is available for the attorney.

Bottom line, OPDS needed to save money (and did). Plus, it was good for the planet.

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