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# Biz of Acq-It's Not Easy Being Green: Disposal of Unwanted Legal Materials

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## It's Not Easy Being Green: Disposal of Unwanted Legal Materials

by **William Benemann** (Head of Technical Services, Boalt Hall Law Library, University of California, Berkeley)

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If you are an even mildly environmentally-conscious librarian, the amount of wood pulp leaving your building in the form of withdrawn books and superseded supplements can't help but leave you shaking in your Birkenstocks. The need to provide the very latest information compels us to update significant portions of our collection on an ongoing basis, and in a large law library such as ours (UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall Law Library), a mound of pocket parts, paperback supplements, looseleaf pages — and even sturdily-bound, barely-used volumes — passes through our office and into landfill at an alarming rate. To make matters worse, Boalt is faced with a chronic shortage of shelf space (despite being housed in a newly-remodeled building). What can't go into remote storage will have to be withdrawn from the collection. Many second copies, superseded editions and low-use reporters that are now available online will become, as they say, *toast*.

Feeling a huge karma debt mounting at our collective backs, we set out to save trees, Mother Earth and our immortal souls by seeking alternatives to the city dump. A posting on LAW-TECH elicited many good suggestions from colleagues on how we might proceed, and with 0.002% of the law librarians of our great nation reporting, here is a Highly UnScientific Survey of Law Library Disposal Methods.

Books that still have a viable shelf life are, of course, the easiest problem to address. If one's major concern is to place the discarded books in good homes, the best bet is NEEDSANDOFFERS-L. This electronic bulletin board allows law librarians to post announcements of titles they are discarding, or to advertise that they are looking for a particular book. Traffic on the list is lively, but not overwhelming, so don't be afraid to sign on to yet *another* list. To subscribe, send an email message to listproc@law.wuacc.edu that reads: SUBSCRIBE NEEDSANDOFFERS-L [your name].

Several libraries responded to our query by describing procedures that actually raised money from the sale of discards. Some have made arrangements with local used book dealers to take their unwanted volumes in return for cash or for store credit. Some companies will buy unwanted issues of periodicals, but a couple of re-



spondents indicated that they were beginning to think that the small amount of money they received was not sufficient to justify the staff time invested in preparing the materials for shipment. Some libraries held book sales periodically, targeting their own students and faculty through ads in the law school newspaper. Such an event requires a suitable temporary space, and some staff time in setting up and operating the sale. If your campus (or a nearby university) has a Main Library with its own bookstore for disposing of its duplicates, you could try funneling your material through their facility, either placing the material on consignment, or donating it outright, with proceeds going to the host. Finally, some libraries have had success selling books to be used for mere decor: interior decorators, department store display departments, and set designers are all on the look-out for classy props. (Now, if we could just get West to stop using that horrid tan and red color scheme ...) Most respondents indicated that the money raised from any of these sales methods was modest, and that their motivation was more to place the books in the hands of people who might use them, rather than to supplement the library's budget.

If money is not your object, donating the material outright might make more sense. Many small colleges who are attempting to build their law collections would welcome donations. This is particularly true of unaccredited law schools who need to meet a certain volume count before the A.B.A. will smile on them. Far be it from us to suggest that any library would fill its shelves with rejects in order to meet some totally unrealistic A.B.A. requirement, but if you are planning to discard the second copy of a lesser-used

regional reporter, a small academic law library might be grateful for the gift.

Prison libraries are also chronically underfunded and short on resources. Here you might need to consider the appropriateness of the subject matter (*The Travel Laws of Tahiti* might be out of scope), as well as the danger of placing out-of-date materials in the hands of people who will probably not have sufficient access to a librarian to help them weigh the reliability of what they are reading. Contact AALL's Law Library Services to Institution Residents, or ALA's Library Services to Prisoners Forum for advice in this regard.

Many libraries maintain a "free" truck or "free" shelf somewhere in the building, where unwanted books will come to the attention of library patrons. Boalt Hall Law Library has used this method in the past, though we did discover the problem of having discarded books mysteriously migrate back onto our shelves. Despite being stamped prominently WITHDRAWN, despite having their spine labels removed or obscured, the homing instinct was evidently too strong. If you give out your material free and close to home, do not plan on sighing, "Good-bye to bad rubbish." Like rashes and ex-spouses, they will probably show up again.

Much of what we discard has no inherent informational value. Few people will be eagerly seeking superseded looseleaf pages. If you are unable to sell or give material away, try making arrangements with a local paper recycling center. Though this seems like the perfect solution, the hard economic facts of the recycling industry have forced many centers to become quite picky. Some will take only white paper. Some won't touch the paper if it has a slick coating. Most will require you to maintain separate bins for different types of material. If our (admittedly limited) survey is any indication, few libraries are using paper recycling centers to deal with their discard problem.

*Caveat:* before adopting any method of disposal for your unwanted material, be sure to check with your internal auditor to make sure that you will be in compliance with all institutional regulations. You may be able to discard at will anything that came to you as a gift and was never

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officially added to the collection, but purchases — particularly those made with tax dollars — are frequently controlled by legal restrictions. Auditors may require you to keep detailed records that track the fate of your acquisitions for as much as

**Doc Aquis**  
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CatchWord servers are located around the world and act as an electronic warehouse for journals. In instances where the publisher has given permission to UnCover and CatchWord to provide electronic document delivery, users will be able to access the CatchWord servers and order articles of interest. After a request has been placed, users will be able to load the RealPage software at no cost to view the article on their desktop. CatchWord specializes in and works on behalf of publishers to produce electronic versions of their printed material. Its aim is to provide a top quality Internet publishing environment which completely reproduces the look of the original text including tables, graphics, and diagrams. Subscribers to the CatchWord service can access and view the information with the RealPage software. Access to the information on the CatchWord servers is controlled either by subscription or on a pay-per-view basis. CatchWord Ltd. is located at RealPage House, Oxfordshire England; phone: +44(0)1235-555877. The WWW address is <<http://www.catchword.co.uk>>. The UnCover Company and Academic Book Center have announced the release of Books-in-Reveal, an enhancement to Reveal, the electronic alerting service from UnCover that allows users to stay current on the latest periodical literature published. Now, Reveal subscribers will receive weekly announcements of new books published in their fields of interest as well. For additional information call 303/758-3030 or 800/787 7979 or visit <<http://www.carl.org/uncover>>.

WLN has announced the publication of the fifth edition of the **Interlibrary Loan Policies Directory**. Updated for the first time since 1995, the Directory provides libraries with the ILL policies for over 435 libraries in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere. Cost for the directory is \$50 for libraries which have provided their ILL policies for the Directory, and \$60 for libraries whose ILL policy is not available in the Directory. An order form for the Directory can be printed off from WLN's homepage <[www.wln.com](http://www.wln.com)>. For more information call 800/342-5956, 360/923-4000; fax 360/923-4009; or email Kristen Hughes at <[hughes@wln.com](mailto:hughes@wln.com)>.

five years. When dealing with gifts, even those made in previous centuries, be sure that you have the right to dispose of the volumes, and that your library has not legally contracted to keep everything unto the end of the World.

After weighing our options, Boalt Hall Law Library has decided to hold an annual or semi-annual book sale, targeting the law school students and faculty. At first we flinched at the idea of a book sale (who would want to buy this junk??), but our experience with the free book truck came quickly to mind. It always amazed us that the most fundamentally worthless cast-offs — volume two (covers missing) of the superseded supplement to the 1957 soybean report for Yuba County — would be snatched up and carried off as if it were Suleyman's treasure. But will our patrons actually pay for this dross? Will poor law students shell out dough for something that we were reluctant to try to give away? Will (rich) law faculty who have never stepped foot in the Library be lured from their luxurious new offices with the tanta-



lizing prospect of actually *paying* for materials that they usually check out and keep on their bookshelves as if they owned them anyway? Should this writer quit his job as Head of Technical Services, buy a double-breasted sharkskin suit, a pair of white shoes and mirror shades, and start doing thirty-second promos on cable-access TV? Watch this space. As we said, it's not easy being greed — uh, green. 🐾

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