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Library Action Lines -- Tips On Keeping Your Library Green

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This column highlights specific actions librarians are taking to keep their libraries green. Readers are invited to notify the column editor of any posters, procedures, policies, articles, speeches, or other material useful for keeping our libraries and institutions environmentally responsible.

How do Green Libraries Discard Their Unwanted Books?

Librarians do their best to find a good home for their discards and unusable donations. Without proper recycling facilities, the librarian is often left with few alternatives but to fill the library dumpster and local landfill. Here are some suggestions for reusing books:

Offer to Other Libraries

Notify other libraries taking advantage of local listserves or individual e-mail. Remember, we are trying to save paper.

Sell to Book Vendors

Contact your major vendors or used book dealers. Some vendors purchase used books or credit your account. At the University of Colorado Law Library, we cleared several basement shelves and earned \$800 credit with one vendor. For best results try to match your offerings to the unique collecting habits of each vendor.

Participate in Duplicate Exchange Programs

Some library associations organize committees to facilitate exchanging library materials. The American Association of Law Librarians' Technical Services Section has a duplicate exchange committee which handles mostly journals, and once a year, treatises are exchanged. This is accomplished via a "needs and offers" list which is sent to participating libraries.

Donate to Foreign Libraries

Many countries are in dire need of reading material. Even if the native language is not English, foreign libraries often welcome books that will give patrons the opportunity to practice English. I have sent large shipments of books to Mexico, Ireland, Poland, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Bulgaria. Contact the acquisitions or gifts librarian at the largest academic library in your state or area for foreign donation information, as this is often coordinated through the above mentioned exchanges. The American Bar Association Section of

International Law and Practice is currently sponsoring the Central and East European Law Initiative, CEELI. CEELI has a solicitation list for the new democracies in Eastern Europe.

Organize a Book Sale

Often, small libraries donate withdrawn items to larger libraries which will offer them at book sales sponsored by a Friends of the Library group. Because of the proliferation of donated material, the University of California at Berkeley conducts a year-round book sale. One option is to have a book truck of sale books near the circulation desk, where monies can be easily collected.

Donate to a Charity or Prison

The Salvation Army, Goodwill Industries, AMVETS, and similar charities might be interested in used books, and most prisons have libraries. One must be careful of donating out-of-date law or medical books which may do more harm than good.

Do not Accept Gifts

Finally, if time constraints or under-staffing prohibit accepting and organizing donated materials, provide a written gift policy which clarifies your library's policy. If possible, try to offer a list of alternative libraries or organizations who receive these donations.

Green librarians know the jargon: "REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE". When we can not REDUCE or RECYCLE, we should be obligated to spend a little extra time finding ways to REUSE our primary resource--books.