

Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future
Concept Paper for 2006 Focus Group Lunches

**SHOULD THE LEGAL PROFESSION PLAY A MORE
VISIBLE ROLE IN THE SUSTAINABILITY MOVEMENT?**

By Dick Roy*

Background. Natural systems of the earth support all social and economic systems and provide habitat for nonhuman species. They are being degraded at a rate that cannot be sustained.

In response, the sustainability movement is now supported by and prominent within a growing segment of the business community, the public sector, higher education, and organized religion. (See below for four definitions of sustainability.) The profession of architecture and a growing segment of the food industry are examples of visible elements of society that have moved smartly to the forefront of the movement.

On the other hand, the legal profession appears to be standing at the sidelines. Although individual lawyers are involved in an array of environmental issues, the profession is not a visible force in the sustainability movement.

Questions to address at focus-group lunch. At the lunch, we will have an opportunity to discuss the following questions and others that may come up at the time.

1. How is the legal profession, as a profession, currently involved in the sustainability movement? What examples have you observed?
2. Is the profession limited, in dealing with a holistic issue like sustainability, by the “boxes” of law that interface with environmental issues? Is the profession limited by the perceived conflict between business development generally and the goal of sustainability?
3. Is there an expanded role for the profession in the sustainability movement? What might that role be?
4. Is there a place for a new initiative, Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future, or some similar umbrella? What elements might be included in the mission statement? What objectives might be stated?

Definitions of Sustainability.

Sustainable development is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

– From *Our Common Future*
UN World Commission on Environment and
Development

Sustainability is equity over time. As a value, it refers to giving equal weight in your decisions to the future as well as the present. You might think of it as extending the Golden Rule through time, so that you do unto future generations (as well as to your present fellow beings), as you would have them do unto you.

– Robert Gilman, Director
Context Institute

“Sustainability” is a term that has evolved from the idea of “sustainable development,” which was originally defined as the realization of the development needs of all people without sacrifice of the earth’s capacity to sustain life. Sustainability... simply means achievement of a balance between human impacts and the capacity of the natural world that can be sustained indefinitely, taking into account three interdependent elements: the environment, the economy, and the social system. A balance between the human and natural world will demand the adoption of a new ethic of sustainability, a new lifestyle and new expectations in order to ensure our collective survival.

– From *Towards Sustainability: Learning for Change*
BC Roundtable

Sustainability is rooted in looking to the inherent workings of nature as a model, with the idea that the natural systems of the world do work in balance to perpetuate life, and by working in harmony with those natural systems, we can sustain our own lives.

– Debra Dadd-Redalia
Sustaining the Earth

*Founder, Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future



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319 SW Washington, Ste 400, Portland, OR 97204 • info@earthleaders.org • (503) 227-2315
The law office tools are located at www.earthleaders.org/olsf/office_practices.*

