

CHECKLIST FOR CLOSING ANOTHER ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

The term "Affected Attorney" refers to the attorney whose office is being closed.

1. Check the calendar and active files to determine which items are urgent and/or scheduled for hearings, trials, depositions, court appearances, etc.
2. Contact clients for matters that are urgent or immediately scheduled for hearing, court appearances, or discovery. Obtain permission for reset. (If making these arrangements constitutes a conflict of interest for you and your clients, retain another attorney to take responsibility for obtaining extensions of time and other immediate needs.)
3. Contact courts and opposing counsel for files that require discovery or court appearances immediately. Obtain resets of hearings or extensions where necessary. Confirm extensions and resets in writing.
4. Open and review all unopened mail. Review all mail that is not filed and match it to the appropriate files.
5. Look for an office procedures manual. Determine if there is a way to get a list of clients with active files.
6. Send clients who have active files a letter explaining that the law office is being closed and instructing them to retain a new attorney and/or to pick up the open file. Provide clients with a date by which they should pick up copies of their files. Inform clients that new counsel should be chosen immediately.
7. For cases before administrative bodies and courts, obtain permission from the clients to submit a Motion and Order to withdraw the Affected Attorney as attorney of record.
8. In cases where the client is obtaining a new attorney, be certain that a Substitution of Attorney is filed.
9. Pick an appropriate date and check to see if all cases have either a motion and order allowing withdrawal of the Affected Attorney or a Substitution of Attorney filed with the court.
10. All clients should either pick up their files (and sign a receipt acknowledging that they received it) or sign an authorization for you to release a copy to a new attorney.
11. If the attorney whose practice is being closed was a sole practitioner (the Affected Attorney), try to arrange for his or her phone number to have a forwarding number. This eliminates the problem created when clients call the Affected Attorney's phone number, get a recording stating that the number is disconnected, and do not know where else to turn for information.
12. Contact the mail practice carrier of the Affected Lawyer.
13. If you have authorization to handle the Affected Attorney's financial matters, look around the office for checks or funds that have not been deposited. Determine if

funds should be deposited or returned to clients. Some of the funds may be for services already rendered. Get instructions from clients concerning any funds in their trust accounts. These funds should either be returned to the clients or forwarded to their new attorneys. Prepare a final billing statement showing any outstanding fees due, and/or any money in trust. (To withdraw money from the Affected Attorney's accounts, you may need to be an authorized signer on the accounts, or you will need a limited power of attorney. If the Affected Attorney is deceased, another alternative is to petition the court to appoint a personal representative under the probate statutes. Money from clients for services rendered by the Affected Attorney should go to the Affected Attorney or his/her estate.

14. If you are authorized to do so, handle financial matters, pay business expenses, and liquidate or sell the practice.
15. If your arrangement is to represent the Affected Attorney's clients on their pending cases, obtain each client's consent to represent the client and check for conflicts of interest.

[Editor's Note: These materials are based upon a booklet published by the Oregon State Bar Professional Liability Fund and entitled, *Planning Ahead: A Guide to Protecting Your Clients' Interests in the Event of Your Death or Disability*, which have been edited for Washington lawyers.]