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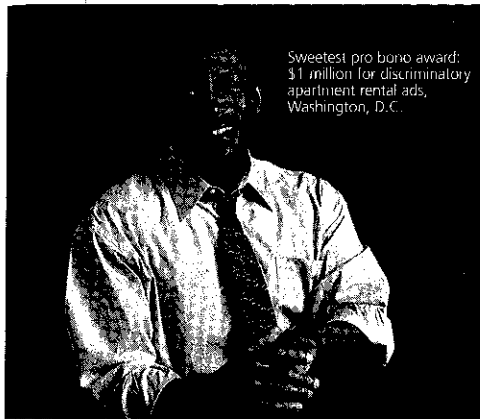
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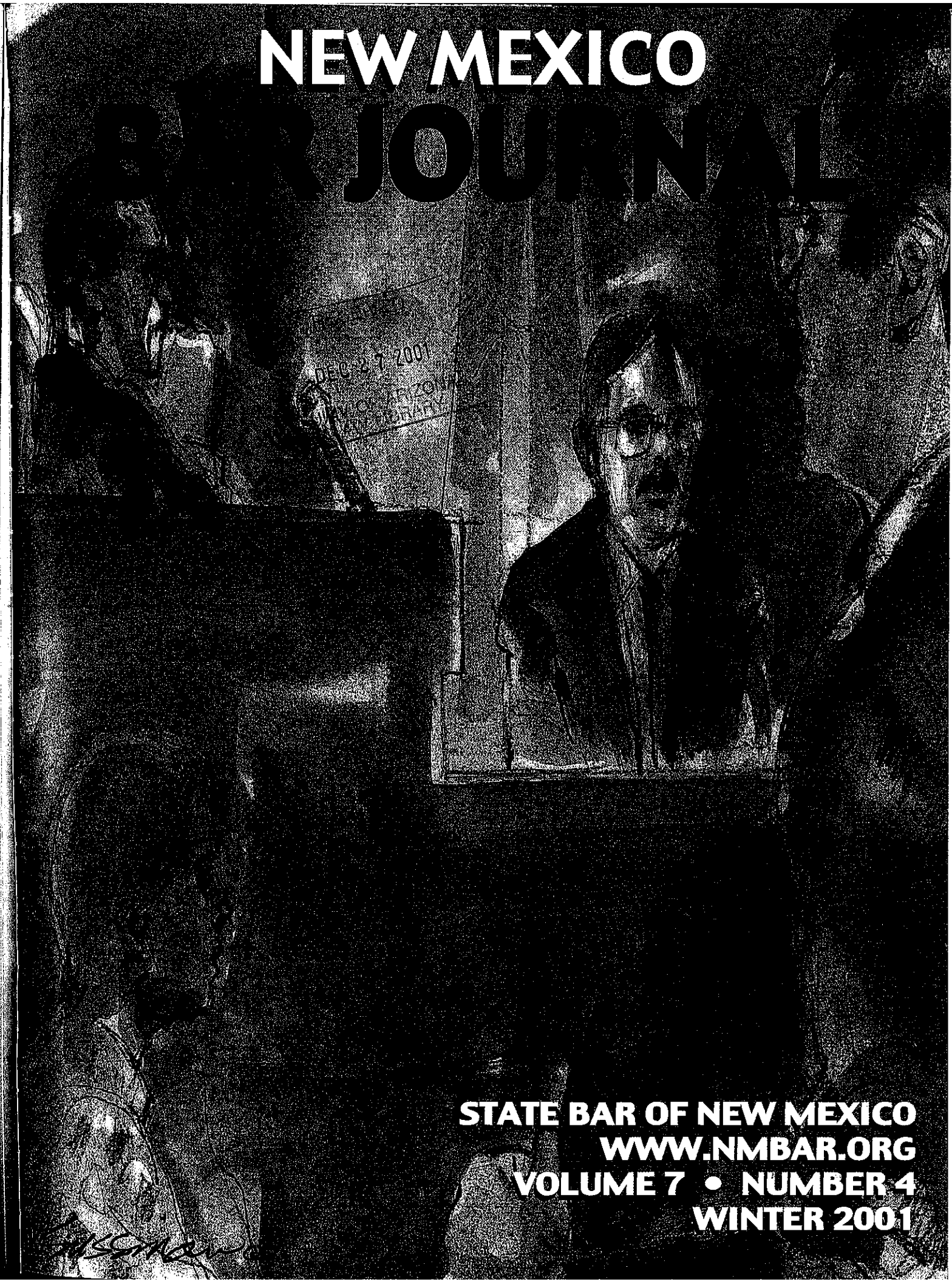
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TECHNOLOGY

*The World of Legal Information: Sources and Strategies**



Researching International Environmental Law

by Ronald E. Wheeler, Jr.

Question: I would like to use the Internet to research issues involving international law, specifically international environmental law. How can

I access relevant information quickly if I have very little information to begin with?

Answer: If you don't have a particular international organization, document or treaty in mind, it is probably best to start with a general search engine like Google or Altavista. Keyword searching with these general search engines can help you to identify particular international organizations, citations to documents, treaties and official Web sites.

General Search Engine Searching

Beginning your search by using a general search engine like Google or Altavista is wise for a couple of reasons. First, this type of searching allows you to search the entire World Wide Web for primary source documents (like treaties, protocols, etc.) as well as learned papers, discussions, and references to these primary sources. Often, if a general search does not retrieve the desired documents, it will retrieve materials that quote these documents, cite to them or even link to them. Hence, such general searching can be quite productive. Second, once you have located a title or document number, searching using that title or document number as your search term is often easier and faster than wading through an international organization's official Web site.

Finding United Nations documents is the perfect example. United Nations documents, treaties, protocols and conventions are often the most authoritative sources for international law materials. Yet, if you have

ever visited the U.N. Web site, www.un.org, you know how cumbersome and hard to navigate that site can be. Additionally, the U.N.'s search engine, www.un.org/search is unreliable at best. Even when you have a document's title or a document's number, you are likely to get hundreds of hits and are therefore unlikely to find the document that you need. However, searching Google or Altavista using a document's title or number can be quite successful. Nevertheless, you may need to examine numerous hits before finding the exact document that you need.

One definite advantage of using a general search engine is that it will be possible to identify Web sites with useful information such as the ones identified below for international environmental law.

The United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Web site, www.unep.org, is a great source for international environmental law materials. The UNEP site contains links to information on the UNEP mission, structure, governance, accomplishments, events and awards, conventions and treaties, its annual report and other publications. Additionally, the site contains a search engine, which allows keyword searching for information on specific topics. Use of the UNEP search engine will yield UNEP documents as well as publications and materials from other international environmental organizations.

Another useful and related Web site is the UNEP Environment Network, www.unep.net. This site is a map portal that allows you to identify an area or region of the world, via an interactive map, by clicking and dragging on a world map and thereby enclosing your area of interest within a red box. You can further limit your search in several ways. First, you can limit the type of material you desire, via a drop down menu, to data sets, institutions and programs, interactive resources, maps and graphics, policy and strategy documents, state of the environment reports and other documents. Another drop down menu allows you to limit by theme. Themes such as agriculture, air, animal

husbandry, biology, climate, disasters, economics, pollution, trade, soil, water and many more are available to choose from. And if that isn't enough, the site also contains a keyword searching capability. Global Environment Outlook (GEO) data, climate change data, data on the Arctic and the Arctic Council, country profiles and more are all easily accessible via this Web site.

The Center for International Environmental Law

The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) Web site is located at www.ciel.org.

CIEL is a public interest, not-for-profit environmental law firm founded in 1989 to strengthen international and comparative environmental law and policy around the world. CIEL provides a full range of environmental legal services in both international and comparative national law, including: policy research and publication, advice and advocacy, education and training, and institution building.¹

This site contains information, publications, press releases and links for all of the following topics: biodiversity, climate change, human rights and environment, international financial institutions, law and communities, law and technology, persistent organic pollutants and trade. This site requires clicking on numerous links in order to locate desired information. It does not provide an internal search engine to facilitate keyword searching.

The American Society of International Law

The American Society of International Law has created a guide to electronic resources for international law with information specific to the environment that is located at www.asil.org/resource/env1.htm. This Web site provides an overview of international environmental law with links to various conventions, declarations, agreements and protocols. It advises users on general search strategies and gives detailed information about online library catalogs, periodical

indexes, and Internet bibliographies and research guides. It recommends numerous Web sites, CD-ROM products, and more for information on legislation, treaties, case law, national regulations and policy statements, and even online discussion lists. This Web site also contains a search engine that allows keyword searching of the site, or drop down menus that allow searching by topic or by publication.

International Environmental Law & Policy: A Comprehensive Reference Source

This Web site, www.wcl.american.edu/pub/iel - out of American University's Washington College of Law - provides links to a host of useful materials. It has six major subject headings: the creation and development of international environmental law; international environmental protection; international environmental law and other legal regimes; researching international environmental law; international organizations active in international environmental affairs; and chronology of international environmental agreements. Each of these sections contains numerous links to documents, Web sites and other materials. Also, there is a treaties link that subdivides treaties by topic. Links to the text of treaties can be found under such topics as international lawmaking, principles, air and atmosphere, oceans and seas, freshwater resources, hazardous waste, wildlife, protection of habitat, international trade and marine living resources.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the Web sites detailed above are merely the tip of the iceberg. There are numerous useful Web sites to choose from containing valuable international environmental law materials and keyword searching with a general search engine like Google is the best way to identify these valuable Web resources.

ENDNOTES

¹ CIEL at www.ciel.org/reciel.html last modified November 29, 2001

* Column prepared by Ronald Wheeler, Reference Librarian, UNM School of Law Library, as a service of the UNM Law Library to the members of the State Bar of New Mexico. For this column to be meaningful to readers, we need your input concerning topics to cover in future columns. We intend to explore alternative sources of information and to discuss the effect of technology on legal research strategies and options. Send your suggestions to Marsha Baum, UNM Law School, 1117 Stanford NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131 or send e-mail to baum@law.unm.edu.