

MUM'S THE WORD

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The fundamental success of any law firm depends upon the professionalism and integrity of its lawyers and legal support staff. While only some of the many matters brought to a law firm are highly charged, *all* matters are extremely personal and sensitive. Clients must be able to expect that their matters will be handled timely, effectively, and *confidentially*. To this end, clients must believe that everything revealed to a lawyer will be held in the strictest confidence, and, in fact, some clients believe their revelations to a lawyer should be treated much like confidences revealed to a priest.



Mr. Hibbs, is a partner with Morris, Manning & Martin, LLP's Environmental Group. Mr. Hibbs' primary practice activities involve environmental issues associated with business and commercial real estate transactions. Mr. Hibbs' secondary area of practice involves legal ethics and professional responsibility including writing, speaking, and representation of individual attorneys and law firms in resolving ethical disputes.

The effectiveness of the legal advice offered is directly proportional to how comfortable the client is that all information, no matter how detrimental or embarrassing, will be protected. Only then can the law firm effectively serve the client by objectively evaluating the client's case—both strengths *and* weaknesses.

While the American Bar Association and the state bars that actively enforce lawyer discipline have all been clear on confidentiality rules applying to lawyers, few opinions have been published spelling out the confidentiality requirements for legal secretaries, legal assistants, or paralegals. Make no mistake