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## **GREEN CHECKS IN The Lodging Industry and the Green Movement**

Around the world and expanding across the United States, the environmental movement of “Going Green” is the fastest growing and most widely received effort to better protect the planet we live on.

While its growth has been greatly enhanced by the scientific and political discussions of global warming, Going Green is much more. It is actually a plan to make adjustments in the way people work and live to create a lifestyle that is more earth friendly. The guidelines address many aspects of daily operations within the Lodging Industry - from cleaning to cooking, comforts to disposables - and while many require financial investments, a number of these programs have shown to cut expenses - some substantially.

Responding to questions and discussions from members about Going Green, the Hotel and Lodging Association of Greater Houston polled its members on what they are doing to follow Green guidelines. As a result, the Association has created this simple guide to areas where hotels and lodging facilities as well as the guests that use them can Go Green.

### **HOTELS AND LODGING FACILITIES**

‘Greening’ by example is one of the best ways to make guests and employees aware of the sincerity of this global effort. Make an effort to explain what is being done and why, and take action to avoid any impressions of hypocrisy. If altering former services such as changing linens daily, for example, **be just as attentive to dripping faucets or running toilets** which also waste water. The following areas can be considered for ‘green’ programs:

#### **Cleaning -**

\* Eliminate perfumed or scented laundry supplies, carpet cleaners and air fresheners as well as harsh and harmful-to-people chemicals for cleaning. Replace with non-polluting, biodegradable soaps.

\* Provide guests the option on when and how often sheets and towels will be laundered during their stay. It conserves water and cuts the use of cleaning supplies.

\* Implement the use of Gray Water, which is recycled wastewater from kitchens, bathroom sinks and showers/tubs, laundry sinks and tubs and washing machines where non-polluting, biodegradable soaps are used. The recycled water is used to water gardens and landscaping, reducing the amount of fresh water used. The water is also naturally filtered through the soil on its way to ground and subterranean water.

## **Disposables -**

- \* Provide recycle containers in the guestrooms and/or around the property. Provide signage and other information to encourage guests to use them.
- \* Use disposable items that are biodegradable like paper and corn-based plastic.
- \* Use durable dishes, cups, glasses and mugs in rooms instead of plastic or other disposables.
- \* Eliminate delivering newspapers to all guests as so many are unused and wasted. Make them available to those who want them. Donate all newspapers received to be recycled.
- \* Purchase recycled materials whenever possible, especially paper.
- \* Consider creating a compost on property, enriching soil and decreasing the need for watering. Also explore reaching out to urban farmers and others who are seeking compost materials for gardens (area farmer's markets are a good place to inquire).
- \* For landscaping, consult with experts and use plants native to the area with a goal of conserving water and artificial maintenance. This not only saves on water usage, but is also horticulturally important to the environment.

## **Food Service -**

- \* Eliminate the use of foam products - cups, bowls, plates and boxes. These consume petrochemicals to make, are not recyclable, take up valuable space in landfills and take hundreds of years to decompose. Replace with recyclable and biodegradable products.
- \* Avoid using endangered or 'over-harvested' types of food products.
- \* Use and promote the use of organic foods where possible. This is a rapidly expanding market and the use of organically grown foods may provide good public relations returns.
- \* Stock mini-bars with items that use recycled and biodegradable materials, such as in packaging for chips and snacks.

## **Comforts -**

- \* Cut back or eliminate heating and air conditioning in areas not in use just as many people do at home. This includes installing energy efficient night lights, insulation and window treatments.
- \* Go paperless wherever possible. This includes providing and promoting in-room electronics for guest service and room service menus and check-out.
- \* When room maintenance or refurbishing is going on, plan and budget for conservation, replacing light bulbs, toilets, shower heads and faucets with more efficient types. Savings in water and electrical use make these changes a good investment.
- \* Use 100% cotton, preferably organic, towels and linens which don't add volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to the air, improving air quality in the rooms. Blends rely on petrochemicals.
- \* Consider providing soap, shampoo, conditioner and lotion from bulk dispensers. This saves time and money for the hotel facility and natural resources, but also greatly cuts back on waste and landfill contributions.

## Incentives -

Going Green is good for the world, but it can also be good for business. As the movement grows, more and more people will want to do business with businesses that are making the same effort. Promote Green efforts.

- \* Consider giving parking fee or other discounts for guests driving hybrid automobiles;
- \* Become a member of Green organizations such as the Green Hotels Association (<http://www.greenhotels.com/>) or meet the criteria for Green guides. Regularly review Green news about building, landscaping and architecture, as well as specifics for the hospitality industry in publications such as Green Lodging News (<http://www.greenlodgingnews.com/>). It's a good way to get free promotion.
- \* Donate bedding, carpets, furniture, appliances etc. to charitable organizations (Houston Furniture Bank) as an aspect of recycling and decreasing what goes into landfills. There may be tax benefits as well.
- \* Use all reasonable resources to inform guests and employees of Going Green efforts. Orientate employees on recycling and conservation. Provide plenty of information to guests on what efforts are in place and how they can help.

## GUESTS -

Going Green is a partnership, and there are many things hotel and lodging facility guests can do to make a difference.

- \* Encouragement takes only a little effort and can make a big difference. Let hotel and lodging management know you appreciate their Green efforts and leave suggestions on how they can do more. If you are doing business with a company because of their Green efforts, by all means let them know.
- \* Ask about recycling or other Green efforts, such as limiting laundry and sheet services, you can participate in during your stay.
- \* Conserve water and electricity (especially lights, heating and air conditioning) the same as most people do at home. Bring your own night light to avoid leaving a more energy wasteful light on at night. Conserve heat or air conditioning costs when not in the room.
- \* Leave unopened shampoo, conditioner, lotion and soap containers in the room. Anything taken must be replaced, adding to waste and landfill contributions. Take open ones with you for home use rather than waste the remainder.
- \* Bring re-useable containers from home rather than requesting disposable carry-out containers from the hotel or restaurant.
- \* Turn off exercise equipment, saunas and other electrical items when you are through using them.
- \* Use paperless services whenever possible.

Have more ideas or suggestions? This guide will be updated periodically as more information is received. Email us at [director@houstonhotels.org](mailto:director@houstonhotels.org)