

## **Hoteliers go green to help save the planet**

### **By Dr. Reese Halter**

Hotels around the globe are competing for customers in a changing world that is demanding green.

So far, The Green Building Council has certified only four U.S. hotels "green" while over 800 office buildings already have its seal of approval. All this, however, is about to change as the race to build energy-efficient hotel buildings has begun in earnest.

A recent survey found that almost 20 percent of travelers choose properties because of hotel environmental practices including housekeeping services that only use non-toxic cleaning agents.

Going green in the hotel industry is not just in vogue – it's sound business to consume less energy, less water and create less waste. For instance, the Marriott's only green-certified hotel in College Park, Md, uses 33 percent less electricity than a comparable property, but that means it can charge the same rates as rivals yet earn a far better profit.

Forward thinking decisions by management teams are taking advantage of innovative technologies and significantly reducing greenhouse gases. Moreover, hotel chains are supporting clean renewable energy industries, creating new jobs.

Earlier this year Accor North America and its Sofitel Hotels signed an agreement with a wind energy supplier Community Energy Inc. to purchase clean, renewable, wind energy for all of its nine locations in the U.S. This laudable decision prevents two million tonnes of CO2 a year from being emitted or not driving 3.8 million kilometers.

Fairmont has been implementing energy-saving measures for years - all front-desk computers in North America are run on wind power bought from a sustainable energy cooperative. Several of its golf courses are irrigated with recycled water and Audubon certified sanctuaries are protecting the environment by maintaining precious wildlife habitat.

Fairmont has also partnered with the World Wildlife Fund entering its Climate Saver Program to reduce its global footprint on climate change.

In order to be certified green by the U.S. Green Building Council buildings must adhere to the Leadership Energy and Environmental Design Standards. The criteria includes: recycling construction waste, locating near mass transit, planting water-efficient landscaping, installing windows that open and using solar tubes, choosing lower-energy elevators and laundry machines, using Forest Stewardship certified wood and other recycled materials, and covering rooftops with tiles made from recycled tires or planting sedum as green roof cover.

There are currently 61 applications for U.S. hotel projects including 7,500 hotel rooms with MGM Mirage's \$7.4 billion City Center in Las Vegas.

The leader for being the most innovative and green in the hotel sector belongs to Marriott International with over 3,000 global properties.

Marriott has partnered with Conservation International and is the first major hotel company to calculate its carbon footprint and launch an aggressive worldwide campaign to lessen its impact.

Each year it uses 2.9 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> or 30 kilograms per available room. To offset this they have undertaken a remarkable initiative. Marriott is protecting 589,000 hectares of endangered rainforest (because forests absorb and store CO<sub>2</sub>) in the Juma Sustainable Development Reserve in partnership with the state of Amazonas in Brazil.

As a part of Marriott's long standing commitment to the environment they have implemented the following: Linen Reuse Program which encourages guests to reuse towels and linens and saves an average of 11 to 17 percent on hot water and sewer costs at each hotel; Re-lamp Campaign which in 2006 replaced 450,000 light bulbs with CFLs, saving 65 percent on lighting costs and energy usage in guest rooms; and replacing 400,000 showerheads and toilets with low-flow devices, reducing hot water consumption by at least 10 percent.

By 2017, over 40 Marriott's will be outfitted with solar panels.

Marriott's buy 47 million pens each year for their guest rooms and in partnership with BIC the pens are now made of 75 percent recycled plastic.

Twenty three million liters of water are saved each year because they buy towels made by Standard Textile that are "room ready" and do not require a launder before first-time use.

Marriott buys over four million liters of paint low in volatile organic compounds, which are safer to use, less polluting and reduces health risks.

Thirty-four of its managed golf courses throughout North America and the Caribbean are becoming certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.

In 2008 the Marriott headquarters in Bethesda, Md became waste-neutral by replacing 2.5 million pieces of plastic and Styrofoam utensils with those made of potato – Spudware – sugar cane and cornstarch that biodegrade within 100 days.

When you travel make a difference; choose a green hotel, place your towels on the racks, skip maid services for a day or two, turn off lights and the television when you leave your room, and unplug cell phone, laptop and MP3 adapters.

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