

Hotel/Motel Waste Reduction

GUEST ROOMS • HOUSEKEEPING

This waste reduction fact sheet is one in a series produced by the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA) to assist the lodging industry and concerned professionals in efforts to reduce waste and enjoy the benefits of cost savings and a public image as environmentally responsible organizations.

A shampoo bottle... a sugar packet... a light bulb... a notepad...

These are small items, but in guest rooms, they represent more than just dollars and cents. Each of these amenities can become an opportunity to improve the environmental image of your facility – whether you install refillable shampoo dispensers and energy-efficient lighting or reuse linens and purchase recycled-content products.

A typical occupied guest room generates between one to two pounds of waste on a non-checkout day; that amount doubles on checkout days. One study found waste levels for one room to be over 28 pounds per day, depending on the property type and the number of guests staying in the room. Regardless of exact figures, an estimated 80 percent of these wastes are recyclable. Measurable savings in waste disposal and energy and water use are available if guest rooms are targeted for waste reduction and other environmental activities.

This fact sheet explains successful environmental efforts in guest rooms and outlines ways to reduce and recycle waste and conserve energy and water. It also suggests effective ways to communicate these efforts to guests and highlights the success of one property in implementing a sheet and towel reuse program.

GREENING GUEST ROOMS

Depending on the property type and customer base, some of these opportunities for cost-effective environmental initiatives in guest rooms will be more suitable than others. Try as many as you can.

REDUCING WASTE

Question the presentation and packaging of each amenity offered. Eliminating a product entirely or some packaging usually saves money because you do not have to pay for it up-front or again at disposal. Several examples of ways to reduce waste in guest rooms follow.

- **Reduce the volume of discarded newspaper generated** by giving out newspapers in a central location such as the lobby or restaurant rather than distributing them to each guest room. At check-in, ask guests whether they would like a newspaper, or provide a door hanger for those who want in-room delivery.
- **Wait to replace tissues in bathrooms until dispensers are almost empty.** Leave new rolls or boxes for the guests to replace. And if company policy is to replace half rolls, save them for use in employee restrooms or as donations to shelters. Also consider using double rolls, which provide twice as much paper per roll..
- **Eliminate unwanted or under-used amenities** such as shower caps and shoe shine cloths – or offer them by request only. Eliminate plastic liners in ice buckets.
- **Donate to local charities** products such as linens and furniture that still have useful life.
- **Try reusing materials.** Recut linens that are damaged and make them into other necessary items such as chef scarves or aprons. Consider reusing stained bath towels as cleaning cloths.

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- **Choose reusable or durable goods over disposables whenever possible.** For example, provide reusable drinking glasses and coffee cups in guest rooms, and purchase sheets with high thread count for longer wear. Choose reusable baskets or plastic containers for guest laundry over disposable paper or plastic wrap.
- **Try refillable dispensers for shampoo, soap, lotion and conditioner.** By choosing 24-ounce pump dispensers, the Boston Park Plaza eliminated over two million plastic bottles from its waste stream each year. The property used the money saved to buy higher quality products for the dispensers. Many properties also reduce waste by not replacing bars of soap for stayover guests.

RECYCLING WASTE

Common recyclables from guest rooms include aluminum cans, glass and plastic bottles, and newspapers. Business travelers may also generate significant amounts of white office paper. A convenient way to collect recyclables from rooms is to use bags on the side of housekeeping carts; however, some carts are too full for any add-ons. In that case, consider placing bins in common areas such as near vending machines or elevators, but make sure to also place trashcans near any recycling bins in public areas to cut down on contamination. The best option may be to place bins under desks or in closets in individual rooms. Another option is to request that guests leave recyclables on bathroom counters, dressers or tables so that the housekeeping staff does not need to dig through the trash.

CONSERVING ENERGY AND WATER

A typical U.S. hotel uses 218 gallons of water per day per occupied room. Water-efficient fixtures can save 25 to 30 percent on water and sewer bills **with no loss of comfort to guests.** These fixtures are an easy way to reduce water consumption with a short payback period.



- By mixing air into the water flow, **water-efficient showerheads and aerators** reduce the actual amount of water leaving the faucet while maintaining good water pressure.
- **Low-flow toilets** are also designed to perform with less water without sacrificing performance. A good alternative for older, water-wasting toilets is toilet dams or flappers. By limiting the amount of water flushed from the bowl, these water conservation devices reduce water use and costs.

Another water and energy saving approach is to **offer guests the option to keep the same sheets and towels for stays of more than one night.** Properties all across

the country, from resort properties to Holiday Inns, place sheet and towel placards in rooms explaining to guests the environmental impacts of changing sheets and towels daily. Such reuse of linens not only saves thousands of gallons of water, it keeps another batch of detergent from being dumped into waterways. Additionally, facilities can save 50 cents per day per occupied room on laundry and toweling costs by reusing linens. Preprinted cards are available from the American Hotel & Motel Association. To order bulk quantities, call (301) 705-7455.

Consider using **more efficient lighting** in guest rooms. Depending on the choice of lamps, an energy savings of 50 percent or more is possible when rooms are occupied. The following options are available:

- **Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).** These lamps produce more diffuse light than incandescents, so an appropriate wattage is important. Consider CFLs in the 22- to 38-watt range to keep rooms bright and ensure guest comfort. Bathrooms may be a good place to start with CFLs as research shows that bathroom lights have the longest burning hours (possibly because they are often used as night lights).

Caution: A concern with screw-in CFLs in desk lamps is that they can be easily stolen. To circumvent this risk, lamps are being hard-wired to new, specifically designed fixtures from which they cannot be unscrewed. These fixtures are somewhat more expensive, but they prevent theft and save money over time.



- Another option is to use **long-life or lower wattage lamps** in guest rooms.

Occupancy sensors are energy-saving devices that can trigger lighting and heating/air conditioning units when guests enter the room and/or lighting in closets. Some properties have key-activated systems that automatically turn off when people exit the room and are reactivated upon re-entry. If sensors are not an option, have housekeepers turn off lights and turn HVAC units back to specified temperatures when rooms are unoccupied.

INFORMING YOUR GUESTS

Many ways exist to inform guests of the property's environmental initiatives. Send the messages clearly and often to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding. Use as many of the following techniques as possible to educate guests.

- Send an environmental message with reservation confirmations. For example, announce that guests can recycle papers and beverage containers

throughout the hotel, and give a number that they can call for more information.

- Require staff to inform guests and check-in of environmental efforts such as the option to reuse sheets and towels.
- Use placards in rooms to inform guests of environmental efforts; for example, signs in bathrooms can tell how much waste the refillable dispensers for soap and shampoo have eliminated.
- Place signs near recycling bins in public areas or guest rooms that clearly show acceptable recyclable materials and that explain the positive environmental impact of recycling.
- Make sure employees, especially front desk and room service staff, can accurately and clearly respond to guest questions about the waste reduction options in effect.
- Whenever possible, convey your message in easy-to-understand terms with visual descriptions; for example, instead of telling guests that the property has recycled 100 tons, tell them how many trees or how much energy was saved.

The Keys to Waste Reduction Success: Education and Choice

A national hotel chain has a sign in its front desk area to remind staff of the importance of guest satisfaction:

Rule 1: The customer is always right.

Rule 2: If the customer seems wrong, see Rule 1.

If guests are dissatisfied, the facility risks losing business, perhaps for good. An explanation of the environmental initiatives, especially those in guest rooms, helps guests understand the innkeeper's commitment to the environment. In turn, guests will embrace the efforts if they understand that we *all* benefit.

If guests are offered a choice about participating in environmental initiatives, the facility can accommodate the level of convenience and comfort guests expect. Guests who choose "green" habits in their own homes may appreciate a door-hanger that allows them to decide whether to have sheets changed daily. Others may prefer to have newspapers delivered to the door rather than picking them up in the lobby. Individual managers can determine how to balance waste prevention with comfort and convenience.

If guest response to any initiative is a concern, consider implementing a trial run or offering it to specific groups only. The Grove Park Inn in Asheville, N.C., has offered the option to keep the same linens to interested groups such as the North Carolina Recycling Association and the Solar Energy Association.

CASE STUDY

The Radisson Hotel in Asheville, North Carolina

The 281-room Radisson Hotel in Asheville, N.C., has allowed guests to choose to keep linens or towels for stays of more than one night. This effort has not only saved person-hours, detergent, and hot water, it has also limited wear and tear on linens, washing machines and dryers. And to top it off, costs have dropped over 30 percent, from about \$1.15 to \$0.75 per load.

Here's how it works: when rooms are made up, a special card is placed on the bed asking guests to leave the card on the bed the next day if they wish to keep the same sheets and towels. When housekeepers see the card, they know the sheets and towels do not need to be changed. Of course, rooms are totally stripped between guests.

Training housekeeping staff is critical to success, according to Bob Ray, Rooms Division manager at the Radisson. He suggests starting with a trial run. Make instructions available in the primary language of your housekeepers (Spanish, in this case), and test their knowledge. For example, have inspectors mark sheets and set-up various scenarios. Then check whether the proper instructions were followed for each scenario.

Your best measure of success will be guest response. Many luxury or upper-tier facilities are nervous about initiating such programs. According to Ray, their fears are unfounded. He's heard only two complaints in 8,000 room nights; in that same period, he's had over 25 written compliments.



The N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA) provides free, non-regulatory technical assistance and training on methods to eliminate, reduce or recycle wastes before they become pollutants or require disposal. Telephone DPPEA at (919) 715-6500 or (800) 763-0136 or e-mail at nowaste@p2pays.org for further information about the issues discussed in this fact sheet or to discuss any of your waste reduction concerns.

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