



Sustainability

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Do we really need it? Moving to single-stream recycling – Part I

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*®, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

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This is the first installment for a new column for *The Rooms Chronicle*®. In each issue, we will illustrate how to implement sustainable practices for hotel operators. Cutting through the myths, can't dos, and commercial clutter, the purpose of the column is to help hotel operational managers lower resource usage and reduce costs. To address the new, triple bottom-line of sustainability - people, planet, and profit, hoteliers must look beyond the usual cost savings of reducing "man power" and focus instead on resource conservation. Every hotel manager needs to ask him or herself, "Do we really need it?" Our hope is to provide hoteliers and their staff with the fuel and guidance to jumpstart their commitment to sustainable practices that will yield tangible results and actual cost savings. Let's start.

Step 1: Getting the right people onboard

Certainly, you have been reading about the hype from the industry press about the potential to move hotel operations to single-stream recycling programs. Imagine, just one blue container for all of your recyclables including all paper, bottles, cans, and plastics. But, successfully moving to single-stream recycling requires an understanding of the whole system. Making this change will affect your entire operations, particularly if you decide to provide in-room recycling as many hotels are now offering. Finding and hiring an outside consultant that understands the intricacies of hotel operations is the first and most important challenge. Complicated spreadsheets explaining environmental externalities from energy consumption or pretty logos on tent cards will not get the job done. Hire a consultant who specializes in hotel and institutional operations. Make sure that they can deliver an accurate third-party base line assessment of all of your hotel's current procedures. Hoteliers have to know what they are disposing of in order to make changes and evaluate an accurate collection schedule.

Now get the staff involved. Authorized by the general manager, the Green Team should consist of representatives from each department. Make sure that there are both managers and staff members participating. Since everyone will be required to make changes, everyone needs to get on board. Working with the consultant and the leader of the Green Team, introduce the Green Team to the concept of improving their waste/recycling program through their collective participation. Ask members from the Green Team to assess whether they even need an item first before considering how to throw it away. *Do we really need it?*

For example, many hotels will be evaluating how much in-room reading materials are really needed. Can intra-company communications be made available through the facility intranet or email systems? What about individual butter, creamers, and jam packets? How much waste is generated just by your employees? The "do we need it?" question, needs to be asked over and over throughout each department.

Step 2: From product in to garbage/recycling out

Typically a standard 100+ room hotel will dispose of fifty types of materials per month. Conducting a detailed assessment of all products currently being managed by facility operations, will help to establish a base line. Establishing a base line of operational procedures prior to making an operational change is critical to institutionalizing



real program improvement and quantitatively evaluating the end results. Work with members of the team and the consultant to conduct a complete assessment of the process of product to waste disposal in your hotel. The assessment should detail each item and correlate the item to its particular usage and handling throughout the hotel. The assessment should also include weights or professional “guesstimates” for the disposal of all material. The consultant should present to the Green Team and Management a detailed evaluation of employee, departmental, and outside contractor operational procedures as well as an in-depth evaluation of invoices, contracts, and local commodity and reuse markets. Once a base line assessment is established, Management can now set about adopting recommendations and establishing realistic benchmarks for your hotel’s program.

Step 3: “We don’t want it.”

Your team members should first look to reduce waste and implement aggressive source reduction initiatives. Throughout the base line assessment, request that team members reach into the operations of every department. Ask members of the team to track the path from *usage to disposal* of key items that are used in each of their departments. Diagramming *usage to disposal* paths will help everyone understand opportunities for improving labor operations and potential product/waste elimination. For example, how many times is a box handled from the time it comes off a truck to being disposed of in the dumpster? Is the box even necessary? This process will demonstrate the potential for implementing source reduction initiatives and empower everyone to think about what products and resources are realistically needed to carry out their daily responsibilities. By starting with source reduction, team members can identify sustainable and environmental cost cutting improvements. Remember, not using a product or making an item available is one less purchase made at the front end and is one less item you have to pay to dispose of. Figuring out what you don’t need is a win-win for the environment and your bottom line.

By first evaluating what you don’t need, you are now on your way to preparing your operations for an efficient single-stream recycling program.

In the next issue of *The Rooms Chronicle*® we will present “Moving to Single-Stream Recycling – Part II”, which will illustrate how to adopt recommendations, offer valuable information on negotiating contracts, and give fail-proof methods for keeping your program sustainable. ✧

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