



Sustainability

by Brian Miller, Ed.D. and Evadne Giannini

Maintaining sustainability: Turn out the lights and focus on operational efficiency

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Much of the rhetoric and consternation against moving hotels towards a more sustainable operation is that it “costs too much” or “that we do not have the capacity (skills, equipment, assets) to make a difference”. We strongly believe that this is a “Red Herring”. In this article, we will discuss strategies to improve the financial performance of your operation through the reduction of your energy consumption. Let’s get started.

With the sad news of the challenges that are facing our colleagues in the southern gulf region of the United States, hoteliers are reminded daily of the negative repercussions of the country’s dependence on oil for our energy needs. Although it will likely take a number of various renewable energy initiatives to significantly reduce the national dependence on foreign oil, there are a few simple strategies that every hotel manager can implement right away to reduce the energy consumption in their hotel. The following list is comprised of ten actions that every staff can implement to save money and make the hotel more environmentally sustainable.

Note: Before beginning to address strategies designed to reduce the consumption of energy resources within your hotel, an energy audit should be scheduled first. In most states and regions, this is an inexpensive or free service mandated by the local government and supplied by local energy providers.

1. Educate staff to turn off lights and turn down heating and air-conditioning levels when rooms are unoccupied. During the summer months, remind room attendants to close the drapes when guests are not occupying the room.
2. Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs in guestrooms, lobbies, and hallways. Using compact fluorescent lights can lower lighting costs by up to 75% compared to incandescent bulbs. Also, use sensors or timers for areas that are infrequently used.
3. Replace EXIT signs with energy efficient Light Emitting Diode (LED) exit signs.
4. Where feasible, use daylight exclusively in your lobby, bar, and restaurant for as much of the day as possible. Consider installing skylights and glass panel walls if needed to take advantage of natural daylight.
5. Monitor, record and post rates of energy and water use. Changes in expected usage levels indicate problems, so when this occurs check equipment for possible repairs or replacement. Observe all equipment monthly through an entire cycle and routinely change equipment filters and perform appropriate preventative maintenance to keep mechanical equipment operating at peak efficiency.



6. Know your local building and occupancy codes and lighting guidelines to make sure you do not over light spaces. Clean lighting is brighter lighting, so dust bulbs and fixtures regularly. Dirty and dusty bulbs and fixtures will reduce the amount of illumination but still consume the same amount of energy. If possible, invest in task lighting in offices and work areas rather than illuminating entire work areas at higher levels when it is unnecessary.
7. If the hotel has a pool and/or hot tub, install a solar water heating system and at a minimum use solar pool covers and hot tub covers when the pool area is closed.
8. Know your heating and cooling equipment. All facilities and maintenance managers should understand their HVAC equipment by type, location, function and hazards. Simply tag it, map it and log it.
9. An energy management system (EMS) can help a facility to monitor and adjust air handling units, HVAC equipment, and lighting to provide optimum equipment use. EMS cannot solve maintenance problems, so teach staff to use equipment properly.
10. Place all electric package terminal air conditioner (PTAC) units on a replacement schedule. Like all mechanical equipment, these items lose their efficiency over time with use. Replace with Energy Star efficiency-rated heat pumps or other geothermal technologies.

Efficient maintenance operations is by far the most cost effective/no-cost upgrade that one can implement in any hotel. Do not rely on the one or two knowledgeable employees to run and monitor your operations. The age and efficiency of the equipment should determine the equipment change. Insist on at least Energy Star rated equipment.

If your hotel does have the funds for capital improvements, consider taking advantage of federal tax incentives and local programs by installing renewable energy solutions. Before purchasing heat pumps or new units, check if the equipment is applicable for tax incentives. Contact your local energy provider to find out if there are available grant programs or applicable financial incentives.

No matter what, keep the lobby lights on for those tired night travelers. When leaving a room, remember, "Last one out? Turn it out." ✧

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