



# Sustainability

by Brian Miller, Ed.D. and Evadne Giannini

## Moving to single-stream recycling – Part II: Finding cash from dumpsters

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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*Editor's note: This is the second installment for a new column for The Rooms Chronicle®. In each issue, the authors 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?" The authors' 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.*

Last night hunkered in front of my DVD, I was watching, yes for the first time, Episode 4 of *The Wire* written by the talented Dennis Lehane. Bunk to all you "Wire" fans, is walking with Kima to her first crime scene as a homicide detective spouted some great managers' wisdom. Bunk tells Kima that what you need most at a crime scene is not rubber gloves but "soft eyes."... "You got soft eyes; you can see the whole thing. You got hard eyes; you're staring at the same tree and are missing the forest."

Isn't it true? As we watch our daily operations be repeated every day, isn't it time to use "soft eyes." Repeating procedures and mistakes for the sake of not finding "the forest," we shun away from operational change for fear that we won't know what's going on or that our routine will change.

Garbage is the classic, "no brainer" example. Pick it up, use it, and toss it away. From product in to garbage and recycling out, we repeat and watch the same movements all day long without ever really asking why we are buying or handling the item in the first place or even if it is necessary at all?

As operational managers, to address sustainable product and resource reductions and to implement operational change requires evaluating each piece of a particular operation with soft eyes. After a few months of practice, you will start to see the forest, and, surprise, it will look quite "green."



### Looking at dumpsters differently

Well, you've heard of "dumpster diving" and how to don a pair of rubber gloves and find cash in the trash. Well, just like crime scene work, it's not in the gloves or looking in the trash where one finds the real money. After talking to hundreds of hoteliers, when asked the same question, they will all, at first start, proudly say the same thing, "Oh, the garbage, how often do they pick it up? Garbage gets picked up regularly five times a week, holidays included." I guess at first take that makes you seem like a manager of a well managed facility. Not to mention that you aren't really sure when or if they pick up recycling at all since you didn't even add that schedule to your answer.

But think about it. If your hotel is booking at 40-60% capacity for a period of time, and all of us have been in that period of time, why are you picking up the garbage everyday as if the facility is booking at 100% capacity? The fastest way to find money in your trash is to monitor the capacities of your dumpsters, recycling, and garbage for a period of two months and then modify your contract. And you can simultaneously add single-stream recycling to the contract.

Negotiate for a 24-hour “will call” pick up. No matter what, if you are truly implementing single-stream recycling, even if not in your rooms, you can cut your pick-ups by a third. And since the hotel is probably not booking at 100% capacity for all 52 weeks, monitor your dumpster capacities by taking daily cell phone shots. Now do the math and start saving yourself real money. Not even the garbage man comes to your door for free everyday. In fact, check a few months of invoices, he might be tacking on a few extras, because obviously, you aren’t looking with “soft eyes” at that dumpster either.

“Business as usual” is not always the best and most cost effective procedure. So sit down and start to ask questions. What is his “haul fee” to stop at your door? Why does your bill not always reflect tonnages? How much is he charging per ton in disposal fee for garbage? Is there a different fee for recyclables? You should be paying \$0.00 for a recycling disposal and only for a haul fee.

### **Check for add-on fees**

Is there a dumpster rental fee and a maintenance fee? What maintenance was done on the dumpster(s)? Check for accurate fuel surcharge fees. And, ask what a “screen shot” fee is? Some haulers will charge a \$25-\$50 fee that will be tacked on to your bill for an overflowing dumpster. The hauler is supposed to take a picture, a “screen shot”, and then he reports the infraction to sales so that they can “adjust” your pick up schedule. Sometimes these charges will appear quite frequently within a billing cycle. And that’s right, no sales person calls and you pay the bill, no questions asked.

Think about it. It’s a handy fee. In theory, it could be quite helpful to monitor your need for adjustments in your pick up schedule. But, since they are business people making money by picking up your garbage, does it make sense to have them monitoring when to adjust your pickups? So, in the future, request that if it ever happens again to please contact you via email on the same day of the “screen shot” infraction, so that you can monitor and adjust your operations.

Now that’s how to look at waste and recycling operations thoroughly with soft eyes. With facts, figures, and your own two months of “screen shots”, which you have taken everyday for the two months prior to your conversation, it’s time to negotiate for a contract modification. Any good business person will quickly realize that she is dealing with someone who is paying attention. And, isn’t it always a pleasure doing business with a true professional? Honor your hauler and do your part of the heavy lifting. You will be paving the way to a long-term sustainable relationship for you and your facility.

Having discovered the importance of “soft eyes” for keeping your program sustainable, it’s time to turn off the lights. In the next issue of *The Rooms Chronicle*®, we will address; when, where, and how to “turn off the lights.” In the meantime, if you haven’t seen it; turn off the lights and treat yourself to Episode 4 of *The Wire*. It’s good — real good. ✧

*(Dr. Brian Miller is an associate professor of hospitality information technology in the Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management at the University of Delaware. Evadne Giannini is principal of HospitalityGreen LLC, a company whose mission is to help businesses to execute environmentally sustainable practices in order to reduce their carbon emissions and offset their skyrocketing operational costs. For more information on how to implement sustainable business practices throughout your lodging operations, contact Brian at [blm@udel.edu](mailto:blm@udel.edu) or Evadne at [e.giannini@hospitalitygreen.com](mailto:e.giannini@hospitalitygreen.com). Website: [www.hospitalitygreen.com](http://www.hospitalitygreen.com))*