

# Going Green: A Practitioner’s Guide for Nebraska Lodging Establishments

**Robin B. DiPietro, Extension Hospitality Management — Lodging Specialist**  
**Amanda J. Cayler, Research Assistant, Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management**

Learn how green hotels can reduce their impact on the environment and save money while ensuring their sustainability; this NebGuide includes recommendations and examples.

Green practices are a growing area of interest for the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry in Nebraska and around the world. Green refers to practices that protect the environment and/or products made with little environmental harm because they are produced in an environmentally and ecologically friendly way. Many organizations are trying to slow the negative impact that the hospitality industry has had on the global environment by implementing practices that are environmentally friendly and safe. The growing importance of sustainability indicates that green practices are not a passing fad, but rather will become standard practice among businesses.

## The Lodging Industry

The lodging industry consists of hotels and other businesses that provide overnight accommodations for guests. Today’s lodging establishments provide services for a diverse group of travelers seeking a variety of accommodations.

There are many ways to categorize lodging properties. One way is by the level and type of service provided. Using this method, a lodging property can either be considered a full service or limited service hotel. A full-service establishment offers complete food and beverage service, room service, a business center, fitness center,

concierge service and meeting space. A limited-service establishment offers limited food and beverage options and would not offer a restaurant, business center, concierge service or meeting room space.

Nebraska’s hotel industry includes a variety of lodging properties — more than 28,000 hotel, motel, and bed and breakfast rooms in both rural and urban areas — that have an annual occupancy rate of 50-60 percent. While the state’s larger chain hotels offer a wide range of services from room service to convention and meeting space, its smaller properties and bed and breakfasts offer a variety of other amenities. Each year travelers coming into Nebraska spend an estimated \$3.4 billion dollars.

## What are Green Hotels?

Green hotels are lodging properties that implement environmentally friendly practices and programs to save water and energy while reducing solid waste. The goal for green lodging properties is to minimize their impact on the environment. It is important to note that while an individual lodging property’s impact on the environment may be small, the collective impact of lodging properties on the local environment can be quite significant. Green hotels are embracing the concept of sustainability by applying it to all levels of their organization. These hotels benefit by saving money while doing less harm to the environment.

There are two ways to identify a lodging property as a green establishment in addition to noting whether it implements green operational practices.

1. The property belongs to environmentally concerned lodging organizations committed to conserving resources and making their properties energy efficient. Many of these associations can help individual properties assess their current practices and can provide discussion forums for green practices. Such organizations include: the Green Hotels Association, Green Globe 21, Green Meeting Industry Council, and Sustainable Travel International.

### Going Green

The *Green Lodging News* at <http://greenlodgingnews.com> and other information resources noted at the end of this publication offer information and suggestions on how lodging properties can become more “green” and certification processes to document it.

2. The lodging property implements programs to obtain and maintain green certification through Energy Star, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), or related programs.

### **Green Certification**

A variety of certifications can denote that an organization is implementing specific green practices. Many organizations choose to go through a certification process, while others may implement green practices but forego official certification. Two of the most prevalent certifications are issued by Energy Star and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).

LEED certification, established by the U.S. Green Building Council, was created to advance green design and construction practices while increasing profitability and decreasing the negative environmental impacts of construction. LEED certification offers several benefits, the most important of which is providing proof to the certification committee that environmental goals have been accomplished. This proof and records of the certification process are available to the public, which adds credibility to the certification. The LEED process monitors green practices used in the design and construction of facilities and helps organizations develop guidelines and proactive practices. The rating system used in LEED certification includes: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, and innovation and design processes.

Another certification program, Energy Star, was developed by a partnership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy to protect the environment through the use of energy efficient products and practices. Initially the program was developed to convince companies to voluntarily label equipment that was energy efficient. Now, the program offers resources to business owners and managers related to green building design and equipment purchases. In 2007, Energy Star saved businesses, organizations, and consumers \$16 billion in energy costs.

As energy costs continue to increase, Energy Star works to create new technology, such as fluorescent lighting, power management systems, and low standby energy use. Lodging properties can benefit by selecting equipment with the Energy Star high efficiency certification and using Energy Star resources in the design of new or renovation of old properties to meet high energy efficiency standards.

Other certification programs include the Green Seal, ECOMmodation, and Green Globe. Many of these programs require that the hotel or bed and breakfast apply for certification and hit certain benchmarks. For more information on green certification programs, see the Green Lodging News Web site at <http://greenlodgingnews.com/content.aspx?id=502>.

### **Hotel Group Models Green Lodging Practices**

Founded in 1884 in Toronto, Canada, Fairmont Hotels and Resorts has become one of the major leaders in pioneering a new path in environmentally friendly practices. It implemented the Green Partnership Program to demonstrate its commitment to environmental excellence. The program includes implementing recycling programs, energy efficient lighting, energy efficient HVAC systems and windows, and passive energy systems in all lodging facilities. (A passive energy system uses natural conditions, such as sunlight or warm wind, to warm or cool a living environment.)

Fairmont audits each department's operations at every hotel to identify how green operations can be continued. Fairmont employs green policies throughout its properties and looks for unique property attributes that could lend themselves to green practices. They also seek to renovate and build structures that meet LEED certification. Many of these changes have not required a large investment. For example, Fairmont suggests donating partially used amenities to charities and replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs.

### **Importance of Green Hotels**

Both at the state and national levels, the lodging industry plays a major role in the economy. In 2007, the U.S. lodging industry consisted of 50,000 hotels with over 4 million guest rooms. The American Hotel and Lodging Association reported that total industry revenue peaked at \$133.4 billion in 2007, with a per room revenue of \$61.93 and an average occupancy of 63.3 percent.

The issue of sustainability in the lodging industry is becoming increasingly relevant to business and consumer interests. With rising costs, increasingly sensitive demand, and a pressure for economic, social and environmental responsibility, lodging properties will need to respond in a positive, "green" way. With the lodging industry's considerable impact on the global economy, the pressure to work toward a greener and more sustainable environment will only increase over time.

Nebraska's lodging industry consists of nearly 700 hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and other establishments with a total of 28,000 rooms. By implementing "green" practices, a hotel's image can be improved and the impact on the environment can be lessened, all of which can be a positive reflection on Nebraska's lodging industry.

### **Greenwashing**

A potential threat to businesses that are implementing and promoting the use of green practices is greenwashing. As consumers become more aware of the positive impact that green practices can create in the environment, more businesses are talking about how "green" they are, sometimes exaggerating or falsely communicating the extent of their involvement. Greenwashing occurs when a company claims

## How Can a Lodging Property Go Green?

- 1) **Act Immediately.** Take your decision to implement green practices seriously and follow through by implementing small steps now. Only 6,000-8,000 of the more than 50,000 U.S. hotels currently change sheets and towels only on a guest's request. This linen and towel reuse program can reduce the use of water and soap, saving an average 72,000 gallons of water annually for a 100-room hotel. This can add up to a savings of \$20,000 annually.
- 2) **Conserve Energy.** Implement an energy management system and practices to reduce energy use.
  - Use a programmable or sensor-controlled occupancy thermostat in guest rooms.
  - Turn on outside lighting in stages.
  - Run full loads in washers and dryers and avoid laundering during peak energy use times.
  - Replace traditional incandescent light bulbs with energy-saving bulbs. (Changing just one light bulb can reduce energy use by 75 percent and prevent 450 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions.)
  - Install timers or motion sensors that automatically shut off lights when not in use. This can save as much as 30% on energy bills.
  - Use alternative energy sources, such as non-consumptive solar or wind energy for heating and cooling.
- 3) **Recycle.** Institute a recycling system for all kinds of materials, including paper, plastics, glass, metals, and cardboard. This will benefit the environment and reduce the cost of trash removal. Buy products made from recycled materials and add signs and bins in high traffic areas to encourage employees and guests to recycle.
- 4) **Reuse.** Repair or sell out-of-date computers, furnishings, linens, or other items or donate them to charities. Use linens rather than paper wherever possible in guest rooms, restaurants, and employee workrooms. Place a water cooler in the employee workroom to minimize the use of bottled water.
- 5) **Reduce.** Forty percent of what you discard at work is paper. Implement a policy that e-mails and other online documents only be printed when absolutely necessary. Use electronic documents for employee manuals and company newsletters. Buy long-lasting, durable products and buy in bulk to reduce packaging.
- 6) **Rethink.** Examine the practices of individual lodging properties to identify what's necessary and what can be eliminated to help ensure a more sustainable environment. Can drought-resistant landscaping be planted? Can small grassy areas be replaced with low-input or native landscapes? Rethinking policies, practices and building design can help illuminate some creative ways of being green.
- 7) **Conserve Water.** Install low-flow water spigots and reduce the amount of water that toilets, showers, and sinks use. Check the water meter daily to identify possible leaks.
- 8) **Support Local Markets.** Whether shopping for furniture, office supplies, or food, seek local markets first. This will strengthen the economic base of the community and reduce the environmental and financial costs of shipping products.
- 9) **Encourage Employee Involvement.** Encourage employees to take part in green practices at work and home. They could implement a carpool schedule, bring their recycling from home to work and become more energy conscious. Provide educational seminars for employees to understand how they have an impact on the environment.
- 10) **Create a Green Environment.** Use non-toxic cleaners to help decrease environmental impacts, decorate with plants, and use natural light to eliminate indoor pollution.

environmental responsibility but selectively accommodates only those aspects that improve its market image and enhance its financial status.

A lodging establishment may implement several small practices that benefit the environment at the same time they're continuing other practices that endanger the environment. This deception is a problem because it can lead to consumer and regulator backlash. Greenwashing can cause consumers to question the efforts of genuine green establishments and cause the industry to develop a more stringent process for recognizing green products and establishments.

As the public becomes more aware of the importance of green practices and policies, it becomes more important to educate guests and the lodging industry on the correct usage of the term and its implications. It's important that lodging properties take initiative to engage in green practices and help inform their guests about how they can adopt green practices.

### Conclusion

By implementing some of these recommendations, a lodging property can make an impact on their local environment and their bottom line. Producing and using environmentally friendly products and services is not a fad or a trend. It will continue to be important for lodging properties of all sizes to ensure they are creating policies and procedures to encourage the use of sustainable practices by the property and its employees. Providing guest service is critical to the success of the lodging industry; providing "green" guest service will help ensure the continuity of the business into the future.

### Resources

For further information on how to become a green hotel, check these resources:

American Hotel and Lodging Association, <http://www.ahla.com/>

Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program, <http://www.terrachoice.ca/hotelwebsite/indexcanada.htm>

Energy Star, <http://www.energystar.gov>

Green Lodging News, <http://greenlodgingnews.com>

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, <http://LEED.net>

US Green Building Council, [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

**This publication has been peer reviewed.**

#### Disclaimer

Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended of those not mentioned and no endorsement by University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is implied for those mentioned.

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

**Index: Communities & Leadership  
Economic Development**

Issued February 2009

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

© 2009, The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska on behalf of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension. All rights reserved.