

ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

A Two-Minute Briefing on Key Business Environmental Issues

The Big Picture

Business travel is big business in the U.S., comprising a \$185 billion industry in 2000, according to the Travel Industry Association of America. The Survey of Business Travelers tracked more than 200 million single-person business trips in 1999; among overnight trips, 85% of business travelers stayed in a hotel or motel. While this is good news for airlines, rental car companies, and hotels, business travel exacts a heavy toll on the environment.

According to Trees for the Future, a program aimed at offsetting travel-related emissions, a jet emits approximately one pound of ozone-depleting carbon dioxide per passenger mile. That means 3.2 million acres of trees would need to be planted every year to offset the emissions caused by the 240 billion miles the National Business Travelers Association claims are racked up by U.S. business travelers annually. Add in the greenhouse gases generated by rental cars, the energy and water use of hotels, and waste produced by conferences and meetings, and it's obvious: Greening business travel could result in significant environmental benefits.

The Context

Companies are increasingly concerned about climate emissions and energy use. At home, many employers offer incentives to employees who carpool, bike to work, or use public transportation. There's also growing acceptance of environmental factors in corporate procurement policies, for everything from office paper to materials used in manufacturing. But travel buyers remain hard pressed to find options for the environmentally responsible business traveler. The travel industry, for its part, is in the embryonic

stages of "greening" itself — driven by partnerships with the nonprofit sector.

The Green Hotel Association, for example, more than doubled its membership of 100 properties from 1996 to 2001. Member hotels are encouraged to implement water-saving measures, execute energy-saving techniques and reduce solid waste. The Green Hotel Initiative from the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies seeks to increase the demand for environmentally conscious hotels by harnessing corporate and government purchasing power. Groups like Meeting Planners International and Oceans Blue Foundation, both Canadian nonprofits, have programs and resources aimed at making it easy for event planners to reduce waste at meetings and conferences.

Key Players

- **Corporate Travel Offices** hold significant leverage to stimulate demand for greener travel by spending billions of dollars on airfare, accommodations, and transportation.
- **Travel Agents** demonstrate the potential to offset air-travel emissions with environmental projects, such as planting trees that absorb harmful carbon dioxide.
- **Rental Car Companies** can promote alternative vehicles, such as electric vehicles.
- **Hotels and Conference Centers** attract business with energy- and water-conservation and waste-reduction measures. Meeting Planners hold the key to waste reduction on the part of both participants and venues.

Getting Down to Business

- **AT&T's** approach seeks to limit its employee's air travel. The telecommunications leader reduced employee air miles by 15% through video conferencing and Web meeting. Its Environment, Health, and Safety department, for instance, hosts weekly Web-based meetings on environmentally preferable procurement; participants share documents on the Internet while discussing issues on the phone.
- **Nike** has partnered with one of its travel suppliers, Delta Airlines, in an effort to offset carbon-dioxide emission caused by its employee's air travel, which averages 110 million miles annually. For each seat booked on Delta, its Eco-class project invests in environmental projects, such as helping a Portland, Oregon, middle school install high-efficiency boilers — a project that resulted in an offset equal to the total carbon-dioxide emissions from Nike's U.S. employee air travel on Delta in the last half of 2000, according to its corporate responsibility report.

The Upside

- **Reducing climate emissions:** Companies may be able to take credit for travel policies and practices in measuring and reporting their climate impacts.
- **Cost-saving measures:** Using telecommunication-based meeting services cuts down on travel costs and paper use.

Reality Check

- Finding **airlines, hotels, and conference centers** that have adopted environmentally responsible practices will take extra legwork for corporate-travel buyers and event planner.
- Options for alternative **rental cars** are limited to a few major U.S. cities.
- Video conferencing entails **procuring equipment** and a special facility.

Action Plan

- **Review** your company's current travel policies to identify opportunities for greening travel.
- Aside from the environmental benefits, **companies can gain an improved public image and potential cost savings** of introducing environmental concerns into corporate-travel buying and event planning; use these incentives when pitching the idea to management.
- **Purchase** airline tickets through companies, such as Triple E, that offset the greenhouse gases produced by jet planes. Or fly through British Airlines or Southwest Airlines, two companies that have environmental agendas.
- **Seek out "eco-friendly" lodging** using resources like Green Seal, who is working to certify the lodging industry using their environmental standards.

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- **Plan a “green” meeting:** Event planners should look for opportunities to send documents via e-mail whenever possible, use double-sided printing for promotional materials and handouts, and arrange for paper recycling. Promote free shuttles and public transportation. And seek out naturally lighted event spaces.
- **Hold telecommunications-based meetings:** Video conferencing and Web meetings eliminate unnecessary travel and save resources.

Leads

Meetings

- **It’s Easy Being Green! A Guide to Planning And Conducting Environmentally Aware Meetings and Events:** This GreenBiz.com guide offers corporate event planners an overview of the key steps involved in planning a green meeting, and provides a planning checklist.— www.greenbiz.com/toolbox/reports_third.cfm?LinkAdvID=2392
- **Meeting Professionals International:** This Canadian nonprofit provides a comprehensive reference and resource guide to planning an environmentally friendly meeting or event. Includes lodging and transportation information.— www.mpiweb.org/resources/greenmeetings/default.htm
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Green Conference Initiative:** The initiative’s Web site offers a multitude of resources and information to help conference planners and suppliers organize meetings that reduce pollution

and energy and water use.— www.greenbiz.com/reference/webguide_record.cfm?LinkAdvID=5089

- **Oceans Blue Foundation:** A Canadian environmental organization that promotes environmentally responsible tourism, Oceans Blue developed a primer for the meetings and conventions industry. Meeting planners, suppliers, and delegates, as well as facilities operators, will find helpful tips for greening a meeting.— www.oceansblue.org/bluetourism/settsail/navigationaltools/meetplannertipsheet/index.html

Lodging

- **Fairmont Hotels & Resorts’ EcoMeet Program:** The largest luxury hotel company in North America has developed this program, which allows conference planners to order a ready-made green conference at 36 properties in the U.S., Canada, Bermuda, Barbados, and Mexico. The program emphasizes transportation alternatives, environmentally conscious meals and conference facilities, and environmental education for conference attendees.— www.fairmont.com
- **Green Hotel Initiative:** Aims to harness corporate and government purchasing power to encourage more hotels to “go green.”— www.greenbiz.com/reference/organizations_record.cfm?LinkAdvID=10215
- **Green Hotels Association:** The nonprofit association encourages member hotels to implement water-saving measures, execute energy-saving techniques and reduce solid waste.— www.greenbiz.com/reference/organizations_record.cfm?LinkAdvID=3313

- **Green Seal's Environmental Standard for Lodging Properties:** Nonprofit Green Seal is working to build a certification program for lodging facilities across the United States. Check with them for participating states. — www.greenseal.org/greeninglodge.htm

Transportation

- **Travel Cool:** For each reservation made, Portland-based Triple E's Travel Cool makes a tax-deductible donation to the Better World Travel Foundation, which supports community-based, energy-saving projects that offset emissions caused by air travel. — www.betterworldtravel.com
- **Triple E:** Travel agent offers environmental options for travelers and offsets travel emissions. — www.triplee.com

- **Environmental Vehicle Rentals:** Offers pick-up locations at airports in Burbank, Los Angeles, Oakland, Palm Springs, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose, California; plus Phoenix, Pittsburgh, and Reagan National in Washington, D.C. Call 800-937-4401.

The Bottom Line

There's no way to get around it: business travel takes a toll on the environment. And the transportation, lodging, and event-planning industries are just beginning to wake up to the public-relations boosts and economic benefits of incorporating environmental considerations into their business philosophies. That doesn't mean business travelers should wait on the sidelines; for those willing to seek out the resources, there is a growing number of options for environmentally responsible business travel.