

Towel and linen programmes

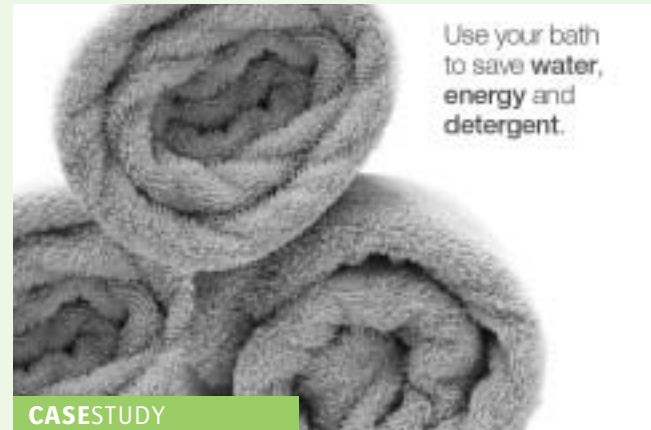
This section can be pulled out and kept separately to build into a practical and comprehensive reference guide on how to manage environmental impacts at your hotel.

Why ask guests to reuse towels and linens?

- Towel and linen programmes can dramatically **reduce the impact of hotels on the environment** by saving water, emissions of CO₂ (from the energy consumed) detergent and the need for the associated waste water treatment and disposal.
- **Hotel guests** have become more sophisticated in their understanding and awareness of environmental and social responsibility issues over the past decade¹. Increasingly, they expect hotels to play their part in protecting the global and local environment and operate in a responsible manner. This is especially true if their destination is in an unspoilt location and close to wildlife and nature activities.
- **Staff** are also enlightened about environmental issues and many of them will already be recycling and saving energy in their homes. Seeing that their employer is committed will improve motivation and encourage loyalty.
- The environmental benefits of reducing resource and detergent use will also **reduce your costs**. The savings can be used for further investment in your environmental programme, staff incentives or donated to charitable organisations.
- Less frequent washing means less wear on fabrics which **prolongs their life**. You may also be able to **reduce the stock** of towels and linens when replacement is due.
- Housekeeping **staff have more time to spend** on tasks other than changing bedlinen and towels.

Facts and figures

- If you ask members of the public about hotels and the environment, the first thing that comes to mind is the **tent card** in the bathroom that asks guests to hang their towels back up on the rail for reuse. Often however, within hotel management, far more emphasis is concentrated on what environmental measures can be taken unobtrusively back-of-house, without impacting on guest comfort.
- More than **3,400 hotels in the USA** offer towel and linen programmes. They are most successful with business travellers and conference delegates who typically do not spend much time in their rooms and who may be more familiar with initiatives adopted by the tourism industry in Europe².
- In certain city and airport hotels where the majority of guests stay for **one night only**, the savings of a towel and linen programme may not be sufficient to justify the cost of the information cards and providing additional staff training.
- **Luxury hotels** are often the least likely to ask their guests to become involved, principally because managers are concerned that having to reuse towels and linens is not compatible with a 'luxury' experience and could be interpreted that the hotel is merely concerned with saving money.
- In a study carried out in 1994³, **87% of the guests surveyed appreciated a towel reuse programme**, while only 5.2% did not. A majority indicated they would like to see the option offered on an industry-wide basis, and expanded to include sheets. They also indicated they would



CASE STUDY

CoaST, UK

In February 2005, **The Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (CoaST)** launched a laundry card initiative offering free tent cards and stickers for hotels in the region to put in guest bath and bedrooms. Strongly eye-catching and original, the programme is designed to raise maximum awareness and take-up by hotels and guests, and is funded by CoaST supporters with contributions from **South West Water** and supported by **Cornwall Friends of the Earth**.

Manda Brookman, Manager of the CoaST project, reports that large and small hotels are now ordering the cards. The design is seen to be contemporary and engaging, offering the business a powerful means of saving resources and sending out a strong environmental message.

more information: Manda Brookman

tel: + 44 (0) 1872 562057 **email:** manda@coastproject.co.uk

Notable examples:

- Through its 'Conserving for Tomorrow' towels and linen programme in the USA, participating **InterContinental Hotels Group** properties saved more than 52.6 million gallons of water and 350,797 gallons of detergent in 2004.
- On average, 150 guests use the towel and linen programme each month at **The Orchid Hotel, Mumbai** in India.
- The towel and linen programme at the **Primrose Valley Hotel** in Cornwall, UK, slashed the amount of laundry overnight. With a full hotel they could be washing more than 60 items a day but this was reduced to as few as five.
- On signing up to the **Roteiros de Charme** hotel association in Brazil, hotel members undertake 'to avoid the unnecessary change of towels, informing the guests that whenever they wish that the towels be changed, all they have to do is to leave them on the floor'.
- 86% of **Rezidor SAS Hospitality** properties operate towel and linen programmes.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

- ✓ Hotel general managers
- ✓ Housekeeping staff
- ✓ Green team leaders
- ✓ HR and/or training managers
- ✓ Purchasing managers

RESOURCES

Cleaning chemicals,
greenhotelier know-how
number 7

**Energy Efficiency in
Laundries and Dry Cleaning
Operations**
Hospitable Climates Energy
measures fact file 9
web: www.hcima.org.uk

**Environmental Dossier
on Professional Laundry,
Industrial &
Institutional Sector**
Published by AISE,
October 2000
web: [www.aise-net.org/
PDF/Pro_laundry_dossier.pdf](http://www.aise-net.org/PDF/Pro_laundry_dossier.pdf)

**Hotel Water Conservation:
A Seattle Demonstration**
Prepared for Seattle Public
Utilities Resource Conservation
Section by O'Neill &
Siegelbaum and The RICE
Group, July 2002
web: [www.ci.seattle.wa.us/
environment/HotelWaterConservationPilotDec2003.pdf](http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/environment/HotelWaterConservationPilotDec2003.pdf)

**Introducing WAVE –
Water Alliances for
Voluntary Efficiency,
Hotel Water Management
for the 21st Century**
Published by the US EPA,
September 1994
web: [http://www.p2pays.
org/ref/03/02328.pdf](http://www.p2pays.org/ref/03/02328.pdf)

TABLE 1 – OPTIONS FOR CHANGING TOWELS AND LINENS

Frequency of change	Action required by guest	Issues to consider
Daily	No action if guest wants clean towels and linen each day. Environmentally-minded guests need to hang towels back on rack or leave card on bed requesting not to change linen	Environmental savings will depend on how 'green' the guests are. This option is often a good starting point for hotels that are concerned about how guests will react, since the 'luxury' service is the default option
Every second or third day unless more frequent change requested	No action if guest happy with change on alternate or every third day. Guest must specifically request less environmental option – i.e. place tent card on bed requesting linen change or 'towels in the tub'	Defines the establishment as being concerned about the environment, but happy to oblige guests who wish a more frequent change. Clear instructions need to be given so the guest understands how the system works
Every second or third day with a discount on the bill	As above but guest will also need to indicate on check-in/out or on a form in the guest room that they wish to receive a discount for reusing towels	Appeals to the financial and environmental interests of both the hotel and guest. Some hotels prefer to be 'up-front' about the fact that these programmes save money, so why not pass on the savings? Hotels and resorts that donate the savings to environmental or wildlife charities find this is popular with guests
Only at guest's request	No action until guest wishes to request change by placing tent card on bed or towels in the bath	Best suited to 'eco' establishments, particularly in areas where water is scarce or washing is difficult and where the clientele are likely to be highly environmentally conscious

Notable examples:

- **Accor** is currently piloting its first towel and linen programme in hotels in areas of Africa where water is scarce.
- The **Holiday Inn** in Burlington, North Carolina, USA, cut its room-cleaning time by six minutes per room with its sheet and towel reuse programme, resulting in a yearly saving of almost US\$20,000⁴.
- Following the introduction of their re-use programme, **Intrawest Lodging** in Colorado, USA saved 4,248,870 gallons of water (16,084 cubic metres) a year in its resorts, an annual saving of US\$1,300,756⁵.

be comfortable using the same sheets for over 3 days and towels for 2.5 days. Where hotels had adopted such programmes, all housekeeping staff responded that guests were very supportive and, in one instance, had complained when there didn't appear to be a programme in place.

- Linen reuse programmes can save a medium sized hotel (on average) around 6,000 gallons (22,7100 litres) of water and 40 gallons (151 litres) of detergent each month according to 'The Caribbean Cares' towels and linen initiative.

The route to success

The key to a successful towel and linen programme is managing it properly. This means:

- being **clear about the reasons for doing it** (see page 1) and incorporating them into your environmental programme
- deciding **how it will work** in practice – do you take the lead or do you let the guest decide?
- **communicating** the programme properly **to staff**
- carrying out effective **training**
- **communicating** sensitively to **guests**
- ensuring that you also save resources and cut waste through **efficient laundry equipment and practices**
- **monitoring results.**

1. How does the programme work?

- There are several ways to **organise the programme**, and it is important to decide which one best fits with your environmental policy and how you wish to promote the programme to your guests. Table 1 shows different approaches that can be followed.
- Make sure that there is a **towel rail** in the bathroom on which the guest can hang their towels for reuse. In some hotel bathrooms, towels are displayed folded up in alcoves or on shelves with no thought given to where they might be hung up once they have been used. In cooler climates, an energy-efficient, heated towel rail will encourage guests to hang their towels back up for reuse.
- You can design and produce your own **in-room materials** or purchase pre-printed cards direct or through your hotel association. Ensure that you have sufficient stock in hand. The **'Green' Hotels Association** recommends that properties have at least two towel hangers for each guest room so that there is a spare at all times. When ordering sheet cards, base the numbers on how many beds there are in the hotel rather than the number of rooms and order at least two sheet cards per bed. Hoteliers have found that some guests like to take the cards away with them.

2. Staff awareness and training

- You will need to ensure that all members of **staff are aware of and committed to the programme**, the motivation behind it, and what is required of those who will be responsible for making it work.
- As a first step, raise the issue at your weekly **management meeting** and solicit feedback from department heads. Decide upon the process by which guest feedback (positive and negative) will be handled. Once you have formulated the strategy, ensure it is communicated to all staff.
- Proper **training** is vital to success. If a towel card is included in the guest bathroom suggesting that the guest hangs up their towels so that they can use them again, housekeeping staff must follow the correct procedure. They may straighten or refold the used towels neatly for the guest, but not move,

remove or replace them. When guests indicate their desire to reuse their towels but the staff change them anyway, it leaves visitors with a very negative impression about the hotel's management. Only change towels left in the tub, on the floor or in the shower tray, not those hung back up on the rail.

- All sheets must be changed between guest stays. However many **guests staying for more than one night** feel it is unnecessary to have their sheets changed every day. In this case, a card placed on the bed by housekeeping staff can ask the guest to indicate their willingness to participate in the linens programme. It is vital that staff understand that if the guest places the card on their pillow in the morning they do not want the sheets on their bed changed that day, and staff should simply remake the bed.
- The towel and linen programme should become a **feature of induction training**, regular **environmental bulletins** and reminders on **notice boards**.
- **All hotel associates** (especially front-of-house staff) should be **aware** of the hotel's **environmental policy** and be able to give examples of **initiatives** within the hotel if they are asked for them by guests. In many hotels, members of the 'green' team wear special badges so that they can be clearly identified by guests and visitors.
- **Airport hotels** are often reluctant to introduce towel and linen programmes as so many of their guests may be airline personnel who check in and out at all hours of the day and night. Rightly, both hotel and guests are concerned about being absolutely sure that sheets are changed between guests. One way around the problem is for the housekeeper to write in pencil in a designated spot the date, time and their initials. Should there be any doubt, a glance at the note will determine whether the sheets should be changed. The pencil marks will be erased when the sheets are washed.
- In addition to pre-printed cards and door hangers, some companies provide **training videos** and **information packs** to help ensure the success of the programme.

3. Communication with guests

- Helping your **guests and visitors** to **understand** your reasons for the towel and linen programme is as important as making sure your staff operate it effectively. Time used composing the **in-room information** will be well spent. Ensure that it is attractively presented and explain what other environmental actions you are taking in the hotel, particularly back-of-house, so they do not see the reuse of towels and linens as your only environmental effort.
- Consider carefully **how your words come across** – you want to inspire guests to help you conserve resources and reduce waste and not give the impression you are trying to cut costs.
- Make sure that your instructions about the programme are **clear and easy to understand**. It will irritate your guests if they are confused as to what is expected of them. Few guests change their sheets daily at home, and most will be receptive to being given a choice. Explain how the system works in the guest room information, and, if guests need to put a card on the bed, ensure the instructions are also clearly expressed on the card. For example the pre-printed card could say: 'We are happy to provide you with freshly laundered sheets every day, but if you would prefer to help us minimise our environmental impacts, please leave this

CASE STUDY

Sandals Resorts International

Environmental management is a priority within **Sandals Resorts International** and all 18 Caribbean properties take part in the company's linens and towels reuse programme developed with similar priorities to 'The Caribbean Cares' programme. Richard May, Group Director of Environmental Affairs, is convinced that senior management involvement and attention to the programme is essential. "Training and environmental awareness play a critical role in getting hotel employees to buy into environmental programs. Staff will assume that the EMS and its associated agenda are done just to save money, and, if this is the perception, they are less inclined to make the effort to ensure their success. Employees watch very closely for the direction and focus that senior management place on programs such as linen reuse and ultimately adopt the same stance at operating level. It is at the training sessions that the hotel can explain the true purpose and establish the link between laundry use and potential environmental degradation/pollution. Shying away from the fact that such programmes also reduce costs only makes employees more suspicious. It is best to admit that cost savings are a consideration but then to focus on the environmental benefits".

As for the success of the programme with guests, Richard says it has been known for them to leave hand-written notes saying they will use towels or linen again if they have misplaced the cards!

more information

Richard May tel: + 1 876 518 1019
email: rmay@sri.sandals.com

card on your pillow and your sheets will not be changed today. If you would like more information about how we are trying to reduce our impact on the environment, please see your guest information pack or ask any member of staff".

- If you leave a **guest questionnaire** in the room, include a section on your towel and linen policy soliciting feedback.

4. Equipment and practices

If your guests are helping you to be environmentally responsible by reusing their towels and linens, you should **avoid wasting** energy, water and detergent in the laundering process. If your laundry is **outsourced**, talk to your supplier about your towel and linen programme and ask if they are doing all they can to be environmentally responsible. You should also be able to renegotiate the contract based on reduced loads.

For **in-house** laundries, here are several ways in which to ensure the whole operation is as environmentally efficient as possible:

- Ensure that **washing machines and dryers** are properly **maintained** and working at **optimum performance**. Check temperature controls and thermostats regularly.
- When **purchasing** new equipment, check the **water and energy consumption ratings** as these will have the most significant environmental impact over its life. Although some equipment may cost more to purchase, it may pay for itself many times over in lower operating costs.

Footnotes and sources

1. The US Travel Data Center, the research department of the Travel Industry Association (www.tia.org) estimates that 43 million environmental travellers (those who are concerned about supporting environmental efforts) exist in the USA alone.
2. Hotel Water Conservation: A Seattle Demonstration, July 2002
3. Guests' Perception of Water Conservation Options in Hotels: A Case Study. Mark McDermott, 1994. Source: Hotel Water Conservation: A Seattle Demonstration
4. Source: The Color of Money, Sara J Welch, Successful Meetings, March, 2001
5. Source: Project Planet, www.projectplanet.biz

MORE INFORMATION

Association Internationale de la Savonnerie, de la Détergence et des Produits d'Entretien (AISE)
 web: www.aise-net.org

Caribbean Cares
 web: www.projectplanet.biz/pages/caribcares.htm

CoaST Project Network
 web: www.cstn.org.uk

ECA Water Technology List
 web: www.eca-water.gov.uk

Green Hotels Association
 web: www.greenhotels.com

Hotel and Catering International Management Association (HCIMA)
 web: www.hcima.org.uk

Project Planet
 web: www.projectplanet.biz

Roteiros de Charme hotel association
 web: www.roteirosdecharme.com.br

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 Water Efficiency Program
 web: www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency

World Health Organisation (WHO)
 Water, Sanitation and Health Program
 web: www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en

We would like to thank the following for their help in preparing this guide:

- Darren Cook, Hilton International
- John Forte, HCIMA
- Rebecca Hawkins, tourism and environment consultant
- Pia Heidenmark-Cook, Rezidor SAS Hospitality

Every attempt has been made to ensure that this information is correct. ITP cannot, however, accept any responsibility for actions taken as a result.

- **Water recycling and heat recovery** systems re-use the comparatively clean discharged effluent from the last rinse of a washing cycle in the first wash process of the next. By re-using the water (and the heat it contains) both energy and water consumption can be reduced. The payback period of such systems is typically under two years.
- **Moisture sensors** in the form of end-point detectors or 'energy eyes' can be fitted to most tumble driers. They stop the drying cycle automatically and prevent over-drying. The payback period for such systems can be as little as six months.
- Train staff to ensure that laundry machines are **fully loaded** each time they are used and set to the **lowest washing temperature** necessary for effective cleaning. Wash **small loads** in small capacity machines and iron by hand.
- Close **tumble dryer** doors after unloading to retain heat and make regular checks of seals and gaskets to see that they are closing properly and not letting heat escape.
- Your **choice of detergent** is very important. Consult your suppliers and select the option that is best all-round for the environment. Some detergent products contain **enzymes** which reduce alkalinity and enable lower washing temperatures. Some suppliers provide **automatic measuring systems** which dispense only the exact amount required. You should also consider the amount and type of **packaging** used.
- Investigate **chemical-free alternatives** to detergent, such as ionized oxygen laundry systems. By increasing the pH level of the water, the water molecules are activated and penetrate deep into the fabric fibres, lifting out dirt. Not only is the process gentle on fabrics but it is suitable for people with allergies, eczema and chemical sensitivities.
- Fit **water-softening equipment** to reduce the amount of detergent you need to use.
- **Ozone laundry systems** inject ozone into the water which works in conjunction with the laundry chemicals to provide a more efficient wash, reducing energy use through shorter cycles and requiring less detergent.
- **Microprocessor controllers** reduce chemical use by enabling the exact dosage to be dispensed and can regulate wash times and temperatures.
- Check that **ironers** are set at the right speed to dry linen in a single pass.
- Collect and deliver items of laundry in **woven or cane baskets** or **reusable cotton bags** rather than plastic ones. Recycle bed linen at the end of its life by making it into laundry bags. If your laundry is handled off-site, ensure that they use a suitable alternative to plastic wrapping.

TABLE 2 – BENCHMARKS FOR GOOD LAUNDRY PERFORMANCE

Water
■ 12-15 litres/kg for machines with recovery systems (water reused from specific cycles)
■ 23-26 litres/kg for machines without recovery systems
Total energy (electricity, light, ventilation, steam)
■ 1.8-2.2 kWh/kg

Source: Hospitable Climates



CASE STUDY

'Green' Hotels Association

Since 1993, the US-based **'Green' Hotels Association** has championed ecological consciousness in the hospitality industry by publishing guidelines, newsletters and website information for use throughout the world. It also sells water-saving products such as low-flow showerheads, sink aerators and toilet cistern fill diverters as well as pre-printed towel rack hangers and sheet changing cards to support hotel towel and linen programmes.

In addition to materials for hotels, the association has pioneered specially-tailored cards for travellers to purchase at airport shops, tourist centres and travel stores so that they can inform hotels that they would like to reuse their towels and sheets. It also generates public awareness through the media and by working with meeting planners, travel agents, environmental groups and tour guides.

Patty Griffin, President of the association says: "Ten years ago, some hotels were fearful of upsetting guests, but we are well past that now – the 'fear factor' is over! Hoteliers know that guests really appreciate their being responsible and working to protect their destinations by giving guests a choice to reuse towels and not have sheets changed every day. Generally, 70 to 90% of guests who stay more than one night participate. We've even had a few hotels call and report that they are at 100% participation. We very conservatively estimate that the property will save US\$6.50 per day per room where guests use the cards – so they more than pay for themselves the first time they are used".

more information

Patty Griffin tel: + 1 713 789 8889
 email: green@greenhotels.com

5. Benchmarking and monitoring results

- Fit energy and water **sub-meters** so that you can measure your usage for the laundry separately from other areas.
- **Monitor** your resource use on a monthly basis and **maintain records** so that you can compare your environmental performance and financial savings against the same period each year and on an annual basis.
- Establish **benchmarks** for comparing resource consumption year on year. Energy use is typically expressed as kWh/kg of laundry and water use as m³/kg. You will need to:
 1. **take readings** from all relevant sub-meters and convert them into kWh and m³
 2. calculate or measure the **weight** of your laundry in kg
 3. calculate (on a monthly or annual basis) the **energy and water consumed per kg** washed (by dividing the consumption figures by the kg of linen washed).