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## Getting the Guests to Sort

By SUSAN STELLIN

Guess how much trash the average hotel guest throws away every day.

About two pounds — more than half of that paper, plastic, cardboard and cans that those same guests probably recycle at home. Yet according to a 2008 survey by the American Hotel and Lodging Association, just 40 percent of hotels have a recycling program.

While some hotels sort and recycle guests' trash after it leaves the room, hospitality executives say starting an in-room recycling program is a lot more complicated than simply placing blue bins under the desks.

“It’s challenging,” said Brian McGuinness, a senior vice president at [Starwood Hotels and Resorts](#), which offers in-room recycling at its Element hotels and plans to introduce similar programs at other brands by the end of 2010. “These initiatives sound easy in theory, but in practice it’s quite a different story.”

Housekeeping carts have to be modified to keep recycled materials separate from other trash, workers have to be trained in new procedures that may involve union negotiations and the recyclables often have to be sorted and stored at the hotel before being taken away — but not too far away.

Mr. McGuinness said Starwood required that the recycling center “be within a 50-mile radius of any given property” and noted that some Starwood properties would therefore be exempt from the requirement. “Otherwise, we’re hauling recycling materials in a truck burning fuel for 80 miles.”

Even educating guests about sorting their trash is not a simple matter, since recycling is one of those chores that often falls by the wayside on a trip, much like exercising or making the bed. Still, more hotels are offering recycling options, in part because surveys indicate environmentally friendly practices matter to guests.

“Doing in-room recycling is important because the guest sees that,” said Pat Maher, a former hotel executive now serving as an environmental consultant to the American Hotel and Lodging Association. He said younger guests, in particular, often asked via [Twitter](#) or other channels why a hotel did not offer recycling containers.

Besides burnishing their green image, hotels also have the incentive of reducing how much they spend to haul away regular trash. By removing paper, plastic and other recyclables from the garbage, hotels can trim their waste disposal bill by as much as 50 percent, Mr. Maher said — a significant savings in cities where trash removal is expensive.

“In New York City, it’s not unusual to have a \$100,000-a-year waste bill, and if you can cut that by \$50,000 that’s a big deal to the operator of a hotel,” he said.

But the savings is likely to be more modest at smaller properties in less expensive locations. Mr. McGuinness said Element was currently breaking even on the recycling program at its properties. And Kimpton Hotels, which has offered in-room recycling since 2004, estimates its total savings is about \$267,300 a year.

“Just cardboard recycling alone ranges from \$12,000 to \$20,000 a year in savings,” said Niki Leondakis, chief operating officer for Kimpton, which reduces its trash at its 47 hotels by more than 40 percent through recycling.

“What’s happening in each individual city drives our practice,” Ms. Leondakis said. “In some cities, we’ve had to work with legislators to help get recycling programs started.” One trend that may make the sorting process less of a chore is “single stream” recycling, which refers to municipalities with recycling centers that can automatically separate paper, plastic, aluminum and glass.

Hotels are also focusing on reducing the amount of waste that needs to be recycled, with newspapers among the targets for elimination.

In April, [Marriott International](#) announced that it would no longer deliver newspapers to every guestroom in the morning; guests can request a paper or pick one up in the lobby. Although that shift is arguably as much about saving money as it is about saving trees, Marriott estimated it would reduce newspaper distribution at its hotels by about 18 million papers annually.

And Starwood has installed bath-amenity dispensers in the showers at its Element and Aloft hotels, reducing waste from tiny plastic bottles of conditioner and shampoo. But this seemingly simple shift created its own challenges.

“Even the design of the shampoo container was a large initiative for us,” Mr. McGuinness said, explaining that the dispenser had to be lockable (to prevent guests from helping themselves) and the viscosity of the shampoo had to be adjusted so it did not drip.

A bigger challenge seems to be finding an alternative to all the plastic water bottles guests rely on when they travel. Element hotels have a separate tap with filtered water in the bathroom, one of the advantages of building a new hotel with environmentally sensitive design.

But other brands have had mixed results in weaning guests from their bottled-water habit. “People like their water bottles — they don’t want to give them up,” said Lori Holland, a spokeswoman for Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, which has experimented with offering guests carafes of filtered water instead.

In some cases, guests have taken the carafes. Other objections include concerns about the cleanliness of the glassware and a preference for having a bottle of water to take to a meeting — one of the conveniences guests expect when they travel.

“I think that’s the conundrum with operating green but operating as a hotel,” Ms. Holland said. “At what point do you deliver your luxury hotel experience, but also balance that with acting responsibly?”

*With Hotel Trash, It’s a Challenge to Be Green - NYTimes.com*

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