

PUBLICATION

Greening Your Existing Hotel

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The term "green hotel" has been an oxymoron for many years. With hundreds of televisions, refrigerators, bathrooms and heating and air conditioning units, thousands of plastic lotion and shampoo mini-bottles and tons of daily laundry, the carbon footprint of a traditional hotel is nothing short of beastly. However, as hoteliers across the world are realizing, the environmental "greening" of their hotels not only enhances the environment and the well-being of their staff and guests, it also provides a significant "greening" boost to their bottom lines.

While the construction of new green hotels has recently stalled due to the weak lending environment for new construction hotels, there has been a dramatic increase in green renovations to existing hotels. Hoteliers cite an increasing public demand for sustainability, a decrease in operating costs, competition between hotels, the health and happiness of hotel staff and guests and a new sense of corporate responsibility as the chief motivating forces behind the proliferation of green upgrades.

Whether the ultimate goal for the hotel is to achieve a green certification, such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), or to simply refresh its corporate image while decreasing operating costs, there are many renovation techniques available including the following:

- The installation of low-flow toilets, sinks and/or showerheads in bathrooms. The historic [Hotel Andaluz in Albuquerque](#), New Mexico recently reopened after a \$30 million renovation that included the retrofitting of guest rooms with high-efficiency toilets. The Hotel Andaluz anticipates this renovation will save over 100,000 gallons of water per year, and that is assuming only a 50% occupancy rate.
- The replacement of antiquated laundry systems with energy efficient models. The [Hilton Garden Inn®](#) in Gatlinburg, Tennessee (the first LEED certified hotel in Tennessee) recently replaced its laundry system with ozone system soft-mount washers and high-efficiency dryers. It is estimated the new systems will save 205,860 gallons of water and 3,866 therms of natural gas annually, for an annual savings of \$12,021.
- The installation of smarter thermostats in guest rooms. More than 8,600 Motel 6® locations in over a dozen states have been retrofitted with occupancy sensors that cause the thermostat to adjust when guests leave, resulting in significant energy savings, as industry statistics indicate that 50-70% of a hotel's energy bill is attributed to heating and cooling.

There are also dozens of greening techniques available to hoteliers not yet ready to make drastic changes to their energy or utility systems, including the following:

- The introduction of a towel re-use program in all guest rooms that encourages guests to re-use towels after their original use.
- The replacement of light bulbs with LED and compact fluorescent bulbs throughout the hotel, together with sensors in rooms that extinguish lights when rooms are unoccupied.
- Providing recycling bins throughout the common areas of the hotel, as well as recycle baskets in each guest room.

- Educating hotel staff to turn off lights and turn down heating and air conditioning when rooms are unoccupied. Incentive programs for the staff that encourage them to participate in sustainable practices will increase the staff's desire to take part.
- Replacing plastic, paper or Styrofoam cups in guest rooms with re-usable glass cups and ceramic mugs.
- Using non-toxic or low volatile organic compound cleaners, sanitizers and paints throughout the hotel.
- Replacing plastic shampoo, soap and lotion bottles with refillable dispensers located on the walls in guest bathrooms.

The foregoing examples represent only a few of the techniques and methods that hoteliers can implement—even in a faltering economy—to green their hotels through renovations.

Mr. Jones is an attorney in our Birmingham office. Mr. Jones is among the few attorneys in Alabama confirmed by the [U.S. Green Building Council](#) as a LEED Accredited Professional.