

# Corralling Carbon

Going green may be the most overused phrase of the 21st century, yet it's something everyone strives to do — especially in the hospitality sector.

But what does going green actually mean, and what qualifies a hotel to rate as a green facility?

On a large scale, it means building a new hotel or retrofitting an old one to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards, a complex process that even large chains are reluctant to pursue.

Fortunately for the average hotelier, going green pertains more to operations and can be easy to achieve, with recognition for one's efforts coming from a host of different provincial and national organizations.

Vancouver's 114-room Best Western Plus Chateau Granville is a good case in point. Following the lead of Best Western Plus

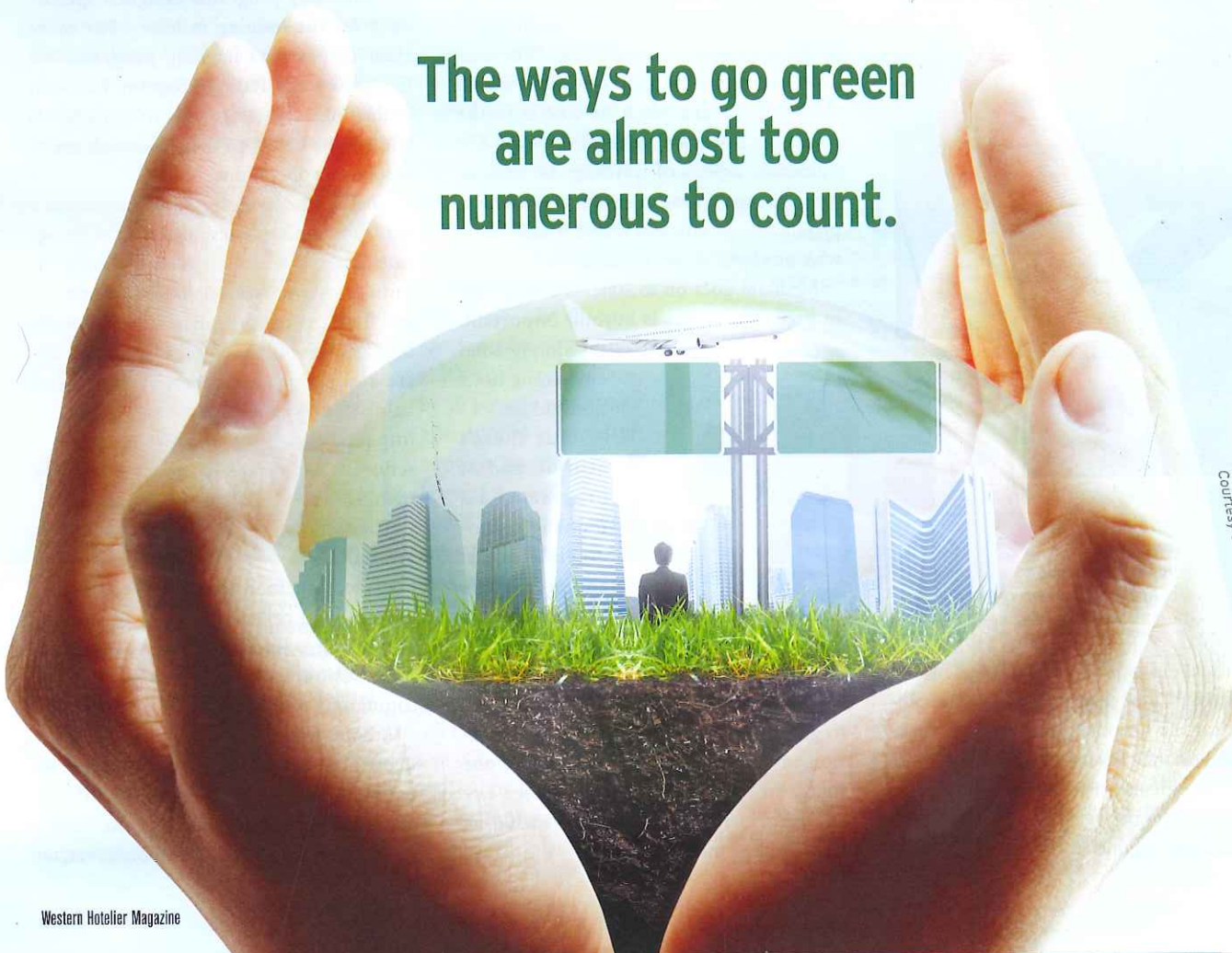
Kelowna Hotel & Suites (a long-time advocate of environmental initiatives), Chateau Granville in September became a member of the EcoStay Program, a carbon off-setting program that helps measure a hotel's carbon footprint, identifies reduction strategies, and supports emission-reducing projects across Canada via an optional surcharge (\$2 per night) collected from guests. Chateau Granville also recently achieved a four-key rating via Green Key's Meetings Program for its Meeting & Conference Centre.

Chateau Granville's Sales and Marketing Manager, Julia Georlette, says going green is important to her for a variety of reasons. "Some of our guests seek out hotels that

undertake environmental programs, and others learn about our efforts during their stay and are pleasantly surprised, so overall it's good for business," she says. "In addition to being good for the planet, the things we do result in cost savings."

Some of Chateau Granville's initiatives include adopting a zero waste food program; and recycling and composting everything from organic matter to paper, glass, plastics, containers and oil. Consequently, kitchen and food waste has been reduced by over 70 per cent, a figure that is expected to increase to 80 per cent this year.

Chateau Granville has also invested in LED lighting, and housekeepers have been



The ways to go green  
are almost too  
numerous to count.

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trained to turn off lights as well as heat and air conditioning whenever conference rooms are unused. All thermostats are programmable to reduce unnecessary heating or cooling, and all windows are being replaced with double-paned systems to reduce heat loss. "We've even installed two stations for electric vehicle chargers in our parking areas," says Georlette. "In a very short while we've become a green leader for Best Western, and with the money we've saved we'll be able to reinvest in things such as motion sensors for lighting and other technology that can reduce energy consumption — and cost."

Some overseers of green programs express a certain amount of frustration that cost seems to be the main driver of environmental initiatives. "The feel-good news is that our efforts are good for the planet, but in reality it's the bottom line that counts to hoteliers," says Andrea Myers, director-program development at Green Key Global. "Does this bother me? On one hand I'd love to see people more engaged in the true purpose of the initiatives rather than just doing it to save bucks and get a rating. But to be entirely fair, a lot of participants engage for the right reasons after signing on for the economic ones."



**Energex is one of the smartest and most cost-effective conservation systems worldwide, and can reduce consumption by 15 to 40 per cent.**

Rami Belson, CEO of Energex Inc. (a Vancouver-based developer of energy solutions for the hospitality industry) is more outspoken than Myers. "Before 2008 there was a big green thrust amongst hoteliers for all the right reasons, but now the momentum is gone. Today they're looking

**The Best Western Chateau Granville adopted a zero waste food program, that has reduced kitchen and food waste by over 70 per cent. They also have two EV charging stations.**



for deals. As for travellers seeking hotels that have green ratings, I think this is a fringe movement at best."

So why bother participating in any green program, especially considering that for every scientific claim backing an environmental concern there seems to be a counterclaim debunking it? Mark Medland, vice-president, operations Western Canada for SilverBirch Hotels & Resorts, points out that environmental concerns aside, most of the programs (in Canada at least) are grounded in old-fashioned common sense. "The concepts of turning the lights out and lowering the temperature when no one is in the room, or not wasting food, or even the numerous aspects of recycling, are nothing new," he says. "Waste in any form is counter-productive to efficiency, and it should be what any hotel strives to minimize."

Medland goes on to state, "Participating in green initiatives is beyond important:

it's simply what any strong hotel needs to do."

But there's also no end of programs on a municipal, provincial, federal and even inter-

national level; how can a time-starved hotelier possibly decide which are effective, which are legitimate, and which suit his/her operation? "There's no better place to get advice than from the Hotel Association of Canada," says Medland. "For one thing, the association sanctions Green Key Global, which many brands — including ours — hang their hat on."



Green Key Global is a leading environmental certification body offering a suite of sustainability programs designed specifically for the lodging industry. For more than 15 years its flagship program, the Green Key Eco-Rating Program, has been evaluating, inspecting, and certifying hotels and resorts based on their commitment to sustainable operations.

The Green Key Eco-Rating Program is a graduated rating system designed to recognize hotels, motels and resorts that are committed to improving their environmental and fiscal performance. Based on the results of a comprehensive self-assessment, hoteliers are awarded a 1-5 Green Key rating and helped on how to reduce environmental impacts and operating costs through reduced utility consumption, employee training, and supply chain management.

The program assesses the five main operational areas of a property (including housekeeping, food and beverage and engineering) and covers nine areas of sustainable practices (including energy and water conservation, solid waste management and community outreach).

A hotel with a one key rating has taken steps to reduce environmental impacts by analyzing its operations and identifying opportunities for improvement. An action plan focusing on resource conservation

and waste minimization has been established and is supported by a commitment to continual improvement. By comparison, a hotel with a five key rating employs cutting edge technologies, policies, and programs throughout all areas of operation.

Medland takes considerable pride in the fact that of Silverbirch's 15 hotels across Canada (another five are either being built or renovated), all have been awarded at least a four Green Key designation, and two hotels in Western Canada (the Marriott Vancouver Downtown and the Red Deer Lodge Hotel and Conference Centre) have earned the coveted five star designation. "Plus, every property has a green team committee that meet monthly to discuss what other actions they can take," he says.

Myers reports that at the end of 2013, Green Key had over 3,000 members internationally. "Although we've been around for 16 years this growth has occurred only in the last few, so we're very happy," she says.

Provincial utilities can also be an invaluable partner in the quest to increase operational efficiency. Reid Arkinstall, marketing product development specialist for BC Hydro's Power Smart Marketing, urges hoteliers to learn about services and resources available.

"Utilities often have programs to help hotel customers identify their best opportunities via an energy assessment while also providing financial incentives for select energy-efficient technologies," he says.

BC Hydro has Power Smart programs that help small, medium and large-sized hotels reduce their energy consumption. For small and medium-sized hotels that don't have a BC Hydro key account manager, the Product Incentive Program is available; this program offers financial incentives and trained representatives to help customers determine the right ways to reduce their energy consumption and which technology retrofits will deliver the best return on investment.

A good example of the help BC Hydro can provide is its partnership (along with the Green Table Network, the Ministry of Energy Mines and Natural Gas, and the Food Service Technology centre) with the Listel Hotel in Vancouver to create Canada's newest and most energy-efficient restaurant, O'Douls Restaurant (now named Forage). Located in the Listel Hotel, the restaurant received a comprehensive renovation. "The main upgrades included a lighting retrofit utilizing

LED technology, control upgrades to the heating ventilation and air conditioning unit, and efficient cooking appliances," says Arkinstall. "The changes are forecast to reduce electricity consumption by 30 per cent or 120,000 kilowatts of electricity: enough to power 11 homes for a year."

But Arkinstall stresses that hoteliers should not overwhelm themselves in trying to reach green goals. "Instead, take baby steps. It's not always feasible to make all the desired upgrades

at once. Implementing changes over time is an effective approach."

The \$2 per night per guest surcharge collected by hoteliers participating in the national EcoStay initiative goes towards funding emission-reducing projects across the country such as renewable

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*The EcoStay initiative funds emission-reducing projects such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, agriculture and recycling that balances hotel operations and makes it completely carbon neutral.*



*All of SilverBirch's hotels across Canada have been awarded at least a 4 Green Key designation; two hotels have received the coveted five star designation.*

energy, energy efficiency, agriculture and recycling — thus balancing the impact from the hotel's operations and making each hotel night completely carbon neutral.

Such carbon-offsetting programs have

earned their fair share of controversy from critics, but EcoStay's projects are listed on the CSA Group's GHG CleanProjects Registry, ensuring ISO 14064-2 reporting and independent ISO 14064-3 verification. Also, each offset tonne is serialized by CSA Group to ensure proper retirement and avoid double counting.

EcoStay emphasizes the importance of carbon setting by pointing out that a typical 150 room Canadian hotel can produce three tonnes of greenhouse gases each day, the same as driving 200 cars, heating and lighting 100 homes or taking 5,000 airplane flights. Conversely, that same-sized hotel can, with a simple linen and towel re-use program, save over 22,714 litres of water and 151 litres of detergent in a single month.

EcoStay's membership is small but growing. "We have the participation of 30 hotels, mostly in BC and Alberta, and this year we're expecting a few summer resort chains to join us," says Christina deVries, director of marketing for LivClean Corp. & EcoStay.

In the realm of privately-run companies that provide systems solutions to hoteliers, Energex is a prominent player. It was formed in 1992 with the intent to develop and supply cost-effective technologies that help prevent

energy waste. Since then, its occupancy-based energy management system is acknowledged as one of the smartest and most cost-effective conservation systems in the world, verified by recognized third parties to reduce consumption by 15 to 40 per cent.

Despite his disappointment with what he considers to be a moribund state of environmental concern amongst consumers, Rami Belson says business with hoteliers is brisk. "Energy-saving technology is becoming more ubiquitous and affordable, so even if someone isn't particularly interested in going green, the green movement is happening anyway. Our systems turn off lights and set back room temperatures thanks to sensors that detect occupancy, and this is important because guests typically spend 11 hours outside of their suites and leave the lights and HVAC units on."

Despite the sheer multitude of green organizations and the daunting array of initiatives that can be undertaken, going green is easier than one might think. Even if some of the more apocalyptic concerns of environmentalists are questionable, one thing is certain: the crusade to reduce one's carbon footprint inevitably results in substantial cost savings for any hotel operation. ●



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