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## Hotels go green as demand grows

### Nashville hotels embrace energy conservation

BY WENDY LEE • STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 6, 2008

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As part of her [job](#) as a "catering and greening coordinator" with BBI International, based in Salida, Colo., Kathie Stucko has to ensure that whenever she books meeting space, it has to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

And lately, her job has become a little easier.



GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

Phillip Woodard works on a boiler in the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. The hotel generates 35 percent of its power and uses natural gas to feed into a generator that produces electricity.

[Be a green hotel guest](#)

#### GREEN INITIATIVES

A look at some of the environmental initiatives hotels are putting in place:

- Water-saving showerheads, toilets and faucets.
- Natural pesticides
- Compact fluorescent bulbs
- Automatic lighting sensors in rooms

— WENDY LEE

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A growing number of hotels nationwide, including Nashville's Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, have added energy conservation measures. These include installing low-flow toilets and faucets to using bio-friendly pest control. The change meets a growing demand from environmentally conscious companies that require green practices.

"It used to be you say green and people thought you were talking about the color green," Stucko said. "It's not that way anymore."

The American Hotel & Lodging Association said about one in five hotels it surveyed plans to add Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, or LEED, standards in the next year.

Locally, hotels including Gaylord Opryland and Loews Vanderbilt Hotel have incorporated several environmentally friendly standards in their properties.

At Gaylord Opryland, about 80 percent of large meeting groups request basic "green" meeting elements such as recycling receptacles at all meeting areas, filtered water dispensers and digital signage for meetings.

"It's not only an essential business strategy.... It allows us to be a much better corporate citizen from an environmental standpoint," said Peter J. Weien, Opryland's general manager and senior vice president.

Gaylord Opryland generates 35 percent of its own power and uses natural gas to feed into a generator that produces electricity. The exhaust from the generator is used to make steam.

The hotel also is able to monitor and control the temperature in its 2,881 guestrooms, convention space and atriums through its energy management system. Gaylord estimated it saved \$30,274 in natural gas consumption last year.

In addition, the hotel said it installed its own well-water system, instead of using city water, that allowed it to save \$107,254 last year. The well water is used for areas in the hotel such as the man-made Delta River that runs through the Delta atrium, an indoor area filled with shops and restaurants.

Stucko's company booked a meeting at Gaylord Opryland in June, hosting 3,000 attendees. Stucko said her company takes its environmental criteria seriously and has turned down hotels in the past that have not been green enough.

"It's important for us environmentally ... to make sure that we're leaving the softest footprint possible when we are doing our meetings," Stucko said.

### **Cost Is A Challenge**

One challenge for Nashville-area hotels is the additional costs to become green. Loews Vanderbilt Hotel pays \$1,052 to have its recycling taken away each month, because the city does not provide this service to hotels, said William Jones, chairman of the hotel's Green Council.

"Unfortunately, Nashville is a little bit behind the times with regards to recycling and going green," Jones said.

Loews Vanderbilt instituted a series of green initiatives by July of this year, including the installation of touchless water faucets and flush valves and began donating food to shelters. But the hotel has not seen a return on all its investments.

"We are actually in the red, but it's something we as a hotel chain, we realize has to be done," Jones said.

More hotels are becoming attuned to customers like Stucko who value green initiatives in the last year and a half, industry experts said.

"It's not a fad. It's beyond a tipping point," said Raj Chandnani, vice president of WATG, a design consultant for the hospitality, leisure and entertainment industries, based in Irvine, Calif. "There's a genuine interest from consumers in it and a generational attitude toward it."

But there is room for improvement in LEED certification, analysts said. A March study by the New Buildings Institute in Washington state said about 25 percent of the LEED buildings it looked at were "significantly worse" in energy usage than earlier design projections. But overall, the study found LEED buildings to be more [energy efficient](#) than the national average.

"There is lots of room for improvement at the program level," said senior analyst Cathy Turner, adding that companies should closely monitor energy usage to make sure results are being achieved.

Still, Sabrina Cowden of The Climate Project said it's important to do research on facilities' green practices. Cowden's group will host an event at Loews Vanderbilt Hotel this fall.

"I think it's a reflection in the general awareness of this problem," Cowden said, of consumer interest in hotels being more environmentally friendly. "People are starting to realize making efforts to be sustainable don't just apply to small parts of their lives."

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