

# For Hotels' Waste Program, It's Garbage In, Compost Out

**GREEN:** Properties Join Businesses and Others In Environmental Effort

■ By LOU HIRSH

San Diego hotels are joining the latest greening wave, keeping tons of commercial food waste out of local landfills.

In July, the **Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina** teamed with the local division of Houston-based **Waste Management Inc.** to implement a program aimed at eventually separating and diverting 100 percent of its food waste, as part of a city-run program that turns those scraps into compost.

**John Ford**, manager of the 1,053-room Harbor Island property, said special containers have been set up and hotel staff members have been trained to eventually collect more than 200 tons of food waste, ranging from materials discarded in its kitchen prep areas to meal scraps left behind by guests. Instead of being buried in landfills, those will be converted into compost at the city's Miramar Greenery.



**John Ford**



Photo courtesy of Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina

**The Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina** has reconfigured its food-waste collection systems to prevent eventually about 200 tons annually from winding up in landfills.

from two weeks to two months before the arrangement is made permanent.

Participants have garnered substantial cost savings along with the positive publicity that comes with going green, Ysea said, since the cost to large businesses of collecting compostable materials is about half that associated with disposing of nondiverted refuse.

### Explosive Change

"We've blown up the process, turned it upside down and inside out," Ford said. "We've totally overhauled how we separate, to where we will be able to divert close to 100 percent of food waste."

In the first three weeks of its program, the Sheraton's diversion rate had jumped from 15 percent to 80 percent, and operators expect to reach 90 percent by year-end. The local hotel showed off its system at a national meeting convened in mid-August by its operator, **Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc.**, which Ford said is exploring ways to emulate the program across its brands, which also include **Westin**, **St. Regis** and **W Hotels**.

According to Jose Ysea, a spokesman for the City of San Diego's Environmental Services Department, the Sheraton is the second local hotel to be certified for its commercial food waste program, following downtown's **Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel**. The 1,190-room Hilton was certified last year and honored earlier this year by the department with its annual "Environmental Partner" award.

The city program was started about six years ago and has gained considerable momentum in the last two years, helped by some of San Diego's largest generators of food waste. The first participants included Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego Convention Center, **SeaWorld San Diego**, Petco Park, San Diego International Airport and local universities.

Most recently, Ysea said the city has made arrangements with seven local **Albertsons** supermarkets to join the composting program, and it will next be looking to sign up more of the big grocery, restaurant and hospitality companies. "We've been trying to bring more hotels and resorts into the mix," he said.

Ysea said candidate sites undergo a careful screening to ensure that the arrangement is viable both for the commercial entity and the city, which is primarily seeking out partners with large facilities. The commercial entity undergoes a pilot program ranging

Ford said the new system is expected initially to save the Sheraton about \$1,000 per month in waste hauling costs, an amount which will likely increase over time.

"Meeting planners tend to want to do business with green hotels," Ford said. "Whether it's good for business or not, it's the right thing to do — and it happens that it is good for business."

Prior to the changeover, Ford said the Sheraton had been using a waste dehydrating machine, about the size of a washing machine, to treat food scraps before disposal, but it broke down earlier this year. When the hotel approached Waste Management about how to repair it, managers were advised by the hauler that there were now more efficient and eco-friendly ways to discard commercial food waste.

The nutrient-rich soil resulting from composting can be used by local farmers, gardeners and landscapers, and Ford said some soil from the city program could be deployed on the Sheraton's grounds.

"It's a very cutting-edge way for hotels to divert wastes from landfills, and it's probably going to be done by others locally," said **Charissa McAfee**, a San Diego spokeswoman for Waste Management.

### The Challenge

In addition to changing waste-disposal practices, several local hotels are among participants in a program started earlier this year by the Port of San Diego, called the Green Business Challenge, encouraging port district tenants to cut energy usage and potential pollutants.

For instance, **Bay Club Hotel & Marina** at Shelter Island recently replaced an old dock system with one made from both recycled and recyclable materials. It is among the first of its kind on the West Coast.

At **Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa**, most of the 140 trees on the hotel grounds are now lit with energy-efficient light-emitting diode bulbs, and the property replaced its 23-year-old, 450-pound-capacity laundry machines with 250-pound versions, bringing substantial water savings.