

# STARWOOD 2011 ROOMS AND ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

## Environmentally Minded...Zero-Waste Focus

The Rooms and Engineering Leadership Conference brought together over 450 Rooms and Engineering leaders from throughout North America at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina to further develop their leadership skills, drive continuous improvement at their properties and dialogue with their colleagues to bring back solutions and learnings. These leaders, and their teams, play a critical role in delivering the Starwood Journey – providing the right environment to create great guest experiences and a culture where associates and guests, owners, shareholders and our communities can THRIVE & WIN.

An integral aspect of the conference focused on sustainability, most specifically on creating Starwood's first internal zero waste conference – minimizing any waste sent to the landfill and recycling or finding reuse or donation purposes for any waste that was created. The Zero Waste Meeting goal along with the overall theme of creating an environmentally minded conference experience helped to shape many of the decisions and products that were used throughout the conference. We achieved this ambitious goal by avoiding single-use products, minimizing printing, and donating anything that could be repurposed and used by someone else at another time. See the list below for highlights of the environmentally & socially conscious decisions made:

- » **Recycling** bins were setup throughout the hotel. We asked our attendees to make every effort to recycle appropriate items and be conscious of what they brought to the conference that could generate waste.
- » All attendees received an **E-Folio** rather than a printed folio to save paper and unnecessary printing.
- » Partially used soaps and amenity bottles were collected for recycling through **Clean the World** in an effort to save lives by providing these items to those who need them most.
- » Name badge holders and key cards were collected at the end of the conference for **reuse** at future events.
- » Printing was minimal and **e-communication** was the main tool for distributing information– majority of information attendees needed was emailed in advance, posted on the conference website or provided on a USB flash drive.
- » Even our vendor trade show was **paperless**. Paper brochures, handouts, etc were not acceptable.
- » Attendees were automatically opted-in to **Make a Green Choice** for their entire stay unless otherwise requested. This choice is our guestroom sustainability program that reduces water and energy consumption and minimizes chemical impact on the environment by foregoing daily Housekeeping service.
- » Attendees had the opportunity to participate in a **Socially Conscious Event (Go Green Racing or Literacy Builders)**, a component of SMP and a Starwood Onsite Specialty Event. These events allowed participants to give back to the local community during their visit to San Diego.
- » Various **organic and locally grown and produced** food & beverage products were utilized throughout the conference.
- » All components of our **Sustainable Meeting Practices (SMP)** Program were in place.

## BY THE NUMBERS:

**500+** CONFERENCE  
ATTENDEES

**2,500** ROOM NIGHTS

**92%** WASTE DIVERSION  
RATE

## MAKE A GREEN CHOICE SAVINGS:

**93,000** GALLONS OF  
WATER

**475** KILOWATS OF  
ELECTRICITY

**273** GALLONS OF  
CHEMICALS

**625** THERMS OF  
NATURAL GAS

# PLANNING A ZERO WASTE, ENVIRONMENTALLY-MINDED CONFERENCE

To ensure we met our goal of at least a 90% waste diversion rate and kept sustainability at the forefront of our planning efforts, we employed a variety of tools and processes. Below is a list of the steps we took:

- » Assembled a **Green Committee** to meet weekly and discuss the sustainability efforts of the conference. Our team included Starwood Corporate members and key leaders from the Hotel Team including the Catering & Conference Services Manager responsible for our event, the Director of Engineering, and the Hotel Manager.
- » Ensured all **Food & Beverage events** utilize bulk-packaged goods and organic and locally grown and produced food products as much as possible.
- » Avoided unnecessary waste by providing **reusable biodegradable water bottles** (as an attendee welcome amenity) and refilling stations throughout the event spaces.
- » Minimized printing and unneeded vendor materials by providing a **USB Flash Drive** to participants. The small workbook that was created used 100% recycled content materials.
- » Included a **Socially Conscious Meeting** event to enable our participants to give back to the community while simultaneously experiencing one of Starwood's unique offerings for meeting planners and events.



[Click here](#) for an example of our **Sustainability Action Plan Checklist**.

## SUSTAINABLE MEETING PRACTICES... TO THE NEXT LEVEL

To begin our environmentally-conscious planning, we looked to Starwood's Sustainable Meeting Practices. These fundamental practices provide the necessary tools and guidance to positively impact the environment and communities in which we operate. For the Rooms and Engineering Conference, we incorporated these practices not only into the planning process, but also into each of our attendee's experience. As highlighted above, many of the initiatives seen throughout the conference were "guest" facing. To view a list of the Sustainable Meeting Practices initiatives, please visit the "Green Operations" section of the Sustainability Resource Center.

## SUSTAINABILITY VIDEO

Our host hotel, the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, created a video to highlight their sustainability efforts and the many unique opportunities their associates and guests can participate in being environmentally friendly.

[Click here](#) to watch the video!

"At Starwood, doing the right thing for the environment and for our communities is more important than ever. Our customers and owners are asking for it. Our guests expect it. And our associates are passionate about it. That's why Global Citizenship will play a key role in all of our activities. We aspire to be as respected for these efforts as we are today for our innovation and our brands."

**FRITS VAN PAASSCHEN**, May 2010

# THE SHERATON SAN DIEGO'S JOURNEY

The nature and scope of our conference provided many new opportunities and challenges for our host hotel, the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina. Below are comments from leaders at the property who were involved in the planning and execution of the event:

## WHAT DID IT TAKE TO PULL THIS EVENT OFF?

It was a great collaborative effort of many people to showcase our sustainability initiatives ...And along the way we learned a few things. It really forced us to look at all of our processes to understand how well we were doing and to see if they were worthwhile showcasing to our peers. In the end, we got total buy-in from all departments. The pride was palpable as everyone wanted to invite their peers into our "home".

Leading up to the event, we participated in a weekly conference call with Jennifer Bauchner, Randy Savage, Kelly Cronin, and team to review progress on an ever-growing to-do list. Both teams (the Sheraton team and the Corporate team) fed off each other and our energy levels were the impetus to making the conference as sustainable as could be. Every week we met, new ideas were presented, each adding a new element to just how green we could be. What started out as biweekly meetings ended up being weekly only so we could stay on track.

Internally, we held similar meetings with the main operations team again ensuring we kept on track. Led by our convention services manager Marissa Patino – who did an excellent job leading the team - we pushed each other to stay focused on putting our best foot forward hospitality-wise but also from a sustainability standpoint. From sustainable menus to ensuring we had little to no waste during meetings, to thinking about how we would capture 100% of any waste that did occur, we were on it.

As a result of all this, we knew we had to change processes. As it turned out, we didn't just change processes but in some cases blew them up and started fresh.

## MAKING SUSTAINABLE CHANGES

One example that literally changed how we handle waste was our approach to food. Up to the conference, we were capturing some of our food waste and dehydrating it into a nitrogen-rich compound that was being added to soil as fertilizer. This was an energy-hungry and time-consuming process, and only captured a fraction of our total food waste. Waste Management helped us connect with the City Of San Diego's Greenery to allow us to begin food composting. As such, we moved from capturing a small amount of food waste to capturing almost 100% and turning this into compost. Sounds simple, right? This was a significant undertaking that required adding food waste receptacles in our food venues, in banquets, in our staff cafeteria and of course the kitchen. Then we had to train the associates on how to treat food waste. We needed a process to move it from point A to point B. And a process to ensure the food waste was 100% pure with no contamination of non-food waste. Sounds easy, but it's anything but. We bit this process off in small chunks and week after week showed more and more improvement. Our team has embraced this new process, and is proud that we have made such a profound impact. As a direct result, we expect to divert 200+ tons of food to composting annually.

We then decided to conduct a waste stream audit at the landfill to see our true waste. While we have had a legacy of being green, we realized after the audit that we could be a lot greener – specifically by diverting more of our recyclable commodities. So after seeing that our waste had far too much recyclable material in it, we blew up that process also and started anew. We had been separating all of our recyclable materials by type, and along the way, overlooked a lot of it. We adopted a single-stream system to capture all recyclables, and once again heightened our attention toward this. We purchased more receptacles for the heart of house. Every work area has blue recycling receptacles in one size or another. Additionally, we were able to procure 24 new recycling bins for the front of house. Now, all public areas have recycling bins adjacent to our trash bins. Our diversion rate from the landfill grew from ~ 15% prior to these two initiatives to around 80%...with a goal of hitting 90%!

Sylvia Butler, director of housekeeping recounts: "After viewing our sustainability presentation, I was so proud and pleasantly surprised at how much we do at our property and also realized we can still take it up a notch!"

Waste Management played a big role in partnering with us and helping to find solutions to these somewhat complex initiatives.

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

As we neared the event, we wanted to pump up the excitement levels in the hotel even further. The executive committee hosted a pep rally, partially focusing on the Starwood meeting. Afterward, there was no mistaking how great the event was going to be! Our associates loved hearing about the event and how all of them were going to have a part in it. Our team jumped at the opportunity to participate where possible, and many of our associates brought in children's books for the book drive that the attendees themselves were participating in.

Then of course, there was the video. We knew we were doing some cool things, so we wanted to show the rest of Starwood that there's always more we could be doing. Knowing we were going to create a video, it drove us to want to embark on new sustainability initiatives so that we could show them off in the video. Case in point was the addition of rooftop herb planters outside our club level windows. Taking advantage of the abundance of sunlight, we added rooftop planters to grow herbs for the bar and kitchen.

In addition to the video, the idea of conducting property tours was brought up – so we started planning those. On these we shared our knowledge with our Starwood colleagues via guided tours of our property focusing on our sustainable initiatives.

"I learned just how effective operations can be when all the rooms and engineering leaders come together as one and work together to reach the one common goal, a happy and well trained associate who will in turn take care of our guests who have found a home away from home in our hotels."

**SILVIA BUTLER, Director of Housekeeping**

"Though the Starwood Rooms & Engineering Conference was less than a week long, the lessons learned in preparation and cooperation will last forever. All of our daily walk-throughs, side work, stand-up meetings, and our day-to-day operations were suddenly magnified, because WE were going to be under a microscope. This was our time to shine. In F&B, our weekly walk-throughs turned into daily walk-throughs. While F&B would love to take all the credit for the successes had, it was a genuine group effort. The F&B venues, Banquet and Culinary Departments pulled together and showed a genuine spirit of cooperation. A day didn't pass where one department wasn't called upon by another. We all had a sense of urgency, we all knew what was coming and we were all there for each other. The conference not only brought the F&B team closer together, but the hotel closer together. When the conference concluded, our team, our hotel, our family had an overwhelming sense of accomplishment, pride and appreciation for one another.

**FERNANDO MELENDEZ, Director of Food & Beverage Operations**

"During this conference, the Sheraton San Diego set the bar for all Starwood properties moving forward, and for the future of green meetings as a whole," said Jennifer Bauchner, Director of Rooms Operations & Sustainability for Starwood, North America. "In order to be successful, the hotel's entire staff of over 600 associates had to be on board with this movement, and they pulled it off and set the benchmark higher than we ever dreamed. We're seeing that the impact on the conference attendees is now disseminating throughout North America, and the trickle of this eco-consciousness will be felt for years to come."

**JENNIFER BAUCHNER, Director of Rooms & Sustainability for North America**

**A very special thank you and congratulations to Scott Hermes, General Manager; John Ford, Hotel Manager; David Prost, Director of Engineering & Sustainability Champion; Marissa Patino, Convention Services Manager; The Starwood Events team led by Larry Hanson and all the leaders and associates at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina. You set out to impress...and impress us you did! You set the stage for future Starwood meetings.**