



Sustainability

by Brian Miller, Ed.D. and Evadne Giannini

Water conservation for hotels — Start today to meet the needs of tomorrow

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle® the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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What a perfect time to visit the Catskill Watershed. As the smells of summer fade and the air takes on the cool hints of fall, the expansive reservoirs that serve as New York City's source of clean drinking water slowly become surrounded by the brilliant reds and oranges of maple leaves, bright yellows of oaks, and the new green growth of evergreens creating a surreal and lasting image.

New York City's water supply west of the Hudson River was created when the New York State Legislature passed Chapter 724 of the Laws of 1905 thereby allowing the city to acquire lands for water-use throughout the Catskills. The blended waters from the Catskills' nineteen reservoirs reach the city's distribution system through an intricate framework of pipes comprised of the 92 mile long **Catskill Aqueduct** and the Delaware Aqueduct, the world's longest continuous underground tunnel.

Picture below: The Roundout Reservoir courtesy of The Catskill Watershed Corporation, Margaretville, NY.



Standing in a newly renovated modern shower looking up into a new chrome shower head, it is hard to make the connections between source and distribution. Only when the water is shut off or the hot runs cold do we stop and think, first about the inconvenience, and maybe for a fleeting second about what if we ran out of water?

So as hoteliers, how do we save water, reduce our costs, and simultaneously meet customer demands? How much water do we really need to use in the daily operations of our hotels without putting serious restrictions on the customers' expectations? How much cost savings can be realized from water saving devices? Lastly, are they the magic bullet to water conservation and cost effectiveness?

Evaluating systems for water reuse or improving current systems for a lodging property's water-intensive processes are worthwhile investments. Implementing general water saving devices and practices can reduce water and sewer costs by as much as 30%. As operating expenses rise and guests become more water conscious, the lodging industry has had to meet their demands for comfort yet conservation.

Although early product performance failed to meet the expectations of customers leaving them with no choice but to return to their old systems, many plumbing manufacturers and retailers have created products that now meet or exceed expectations of the end user. Technology has changed. Products have been re-engineered from the ground up to use less water and most importantly, improve performance and user satisfaction. In spite of improvements and the cost savings associated with purchasing more efficient fixtures, hotel managers can still face resistance from guests due to the perception of poor plumbing performance that can still exist.

WaterSense plumbing fixtures

When purchasing new fixtures for the hotel, consider buying products that carry the WaterSense Label. WaterSense is an EPA partnership program where the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and industry manufacturers established and standardized rigorous certification criteria to meet both environmental and customer standards. WaterSense encourages innovation in manufacturing and helps consumers identify high performing, rigorously tested, water-efficient products and programs. For further information and a complete listing of distributors and manufacturers visit the WaterSense program website: www.epa.gov/WaterSense

Another “no brainer”

Low-flow faucet aerators are simple, cheap and offer the largest water conservation savings for your property. They cost at most \$5.00 per unit and can reduce a hotel’s current water use per sink by over 50%. Additionally, they can also cut the hotel’s hot water energy costs. Studies have shown that savings from these easy to install units will have a pay back of less than six months. Check your existing faucets to see if a low-flow model has been installed. Imprinted on the side of the unit will be 2.75 GPM or lower. Considering that a standard faucet without an aerator typically delivers at a rate of 5 GPM or more, it is not hard to understand the immediacy of the payback

The Must DO “to do”

If your property has not replaced its toilet/urinal fixtures since the 1980’s, consider it a “must do” on your list of upgrades. In 1995, by U.S. federal law, new toilets must flush with no more than 1.6 gallons of water, less than half the amount they used in the 80’s. There are many options and combinations to choose from. From waterless urinals to dual-flush options, all will save a minimum 50% in water over outdated models.

Enhancing the Eco-Guest experience

Most travelers have been introduced to the towel and linen reuse programs that have been implemented through ten years. We know all too well that some of these programs work and some do not, but it cannot be disputed that they all save the property substantial money. In 1999, the Green Hotel Association published a study that stated an average 150 guestroom hotel with an average occupancy rate of 52%, can realize \$17.00/day savings, or \$42,705/year by implementing such a program. Continue to work with your housekeeping staff to provide guests the best possible experience while operating an environmentally sustainable hotel.

Potential problem and solution

Problems with a towel and linen reuse program often are the result of training and communication. Sometimes, part-time room attendants are not always properly trained in the property’s “re-toweling” procedures. And for guests, they may not realize that under certain brand standards the room must look like the pre-set room and will assume that the towels have all been replaced. One suggestion is to place a small card in the bathroom that reads, “We have re-folded your towels. Thank you for conserving water!” Also, remember to train part-time staff to execute the same procedure.

A newfangled shower head

Most hoteliers are aware of the benefit of installing “low flow” showerheads that deliver close to 1 GPM or less. Very recently, we came across an inexpensive but great WaterSense showerhead. On one side of the showerhead there is a small button that allows the guest to turn off the flow of water for intermittent times during a shower while still enjoying the water experience. Guests will likely enjoy this feature as it will permit them to halt the flow of water temporarily while they lather or soap up without the risk of being scalded or frozen out when they turn the water back on again.

Most of us enjoy the respite a hot shower brings, but when we choose to press the button, we get to close our eyes and envision the Roundout Reservoir with just a little more water conserved.

Pictured below: These energy and water saving showerheads incorporate a button or lever on the side to temporarily halt the flow of water while bathers apply shampoo or “soap up”.



From the TRC archives

The following articles about water conservation have appeared in previous issues of *The Rooms Chronicle* and may be accessed from the TRC website at www.roomschronicle.com:

- “Advances in toilet technology pump up potential for water savings” by Glenn Hasek. Vol. 15, No. 3.
- “Saving money through water usage adds up quickly for hotels” by Kit Cassingham. Vol. 14, No. 1.
- “Water conservation can be invisible to the guest” by Phil Sprague. Vol. 11, No. 4. ✧

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