



Virginia Pollution Prevention Case Study Hilton Garden Inn – Richmond, VA

Company Information

The Hilton Garden Inn (HGI) – Richmond is a 250 room hotel situated in the former Miller and Rhoads Department Store in downtown Richmond that opened its doors in 2009. In addition to the guest rooms, the hotel also houses a business center, meeting rooms, a coin laundry, on-site convenience store, fitness room, pool, lounge, and restaurant. The hotel employs approximately 100 associates, including 15 managers. The management company is HRI Lodging (Historic Restoration Inc.) based in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Environmental Challenges and Opportunities

All Hilton Garden Inn locations are expected to implement an environmental or energy project each year, but HGI Richmond has shown that they want to do more than just what is expected of them. Pioneering green practices was on the agenda from the start for the HGI Richmond management in order to lead by example and go above and beyond expectations. The composting program at HGI Richmond was an issue that the hotel was eager to address, but was not without concerns from interested parties. Similar to any new program there were factors that made HGI Richmond second guess pursuing it, such as cost and implementation roadblocks. This was especially the case because HGI Richmond was one of the first hotels to take on the challenge of composting its food waste. There was very little information available to help them determine if this would be a sound business practice and ultimately the right decision for their hotel.

Some of the challenges of implementation were straightforward to address, such as costs involved with purchasing new trash containers and the compost bags that were necessary to get the program off the ground. In addition to addressing the cost of starting up a new program, it was also necessary that HGI Richmond ensure their team of employees was on board with the challenge of implementing a new system for dealing with the waste, different from what they were used to.

Implementation of the Sustainability and Composting Programs

HGI Richmond is a member of the Virginia Green program, which certifies tourism related businesses that have met specific sustainability criteria. HGI Richmond has implemented an aggressive sustainability program that goes beyond the basics. In 2010 the hotel began implementing some of its sustainability programs such as single stream recycling and paper reduction efforts. In 2011, the hotel added their food waste composting program. The establishment of the composting program led to a weeklong audit of the hotel's waste generation and recycling efforts. The audit included weighing all materials that were being disposed and conducting a pilot collection of all of the food wastes. The hotel also did a one-day assessment of every item in every bag of trash, which helped them determine that approximately 20-25% of the total wastes generated by the hotel were food wastes. The waste audit also determined that the hotel was recycling only about 12% of its waste. HGI Richmond partnered with RVA Green

Management Services to help develop its sustainability programs and to conduct the waste stream audit and composting pilot. The compost is picked up by NOPE (Natural Organics Process Enterprises). HGI Richmond was the very first hotel in the region to compost food wastes. In 2012, HGI Richmond recycled over 44,000 pounds of waste and collected over 32,000 pounds of food waste for composting, bringing their landfill diversion rate to 35%.

HGI Richmond has also found ways to green the other parts of their food service. The children's menus in the hotel restaurant come with seed packets for kids to plant herbs, and the coasters that are used in the restaurant and bar have wildflower seeds so that they can be planted as well. The house wine at the hotel restaurant and bar is from Trinity Oaks Winery in California, which plants a tree for every bottle that they sell. Through the Trinity Oaks "One Bottle One Tree" program HGI Richmond has helped plant numerous trees. The hotel purchases roughly 20 cases a month of Trinity Oaks wine. The restaurant and the bar also have local wine and beer options as well and the bar highlights their Virginia beer flight, which is a sampling of some of the beers brewed in the Richmond area. Behind the scenes, all of HGI Richmond's kitchen grease is provided to RVA Bioride, where it is converted into useable diesel fuel for their fleet of vehicles. HGI Richmond has been recycling their grease since 2009 when they opened and they have been working with Bioride since 2013. They are paid a small stipend for the grease that they send out.

In addition to waste diversion, HGI Richmond has also been pursuing waste reduction strategies, such as going paperless for their express checkout. Instead of automatically giving each guest a paper receipt for checkout; all guests are emailed their receipt unless they specifically ask for a paper copy. This project has reduced paper, toner, and labor immensely. The hotel had to get approvals to go through with this project, but it has been very successful and guests at the hotel have rarely asked for paper copies of the receipt. Following the path of the entire HGI Brand, they have also reduced paper waste by reducing their daily USA Today deliveries by 30% and making the digital version available via free internet to all guests.

HGI Richmond has also partnered with the Global Soap Project in Atlanta, where leftover soap is sent to be cleaned, recycled into new bars, and shipped to areas in need around the world. The hotel has been participating in the program since 2012 and it is highlighted during each of the new employee orientations. There is no fee to participate in the program, the hotel only pays for the cost of shipping the soap to the nearest recycling center. It is cheaper than a monthly fee, and the shipping costs are tax deductible. Trash bills are also lower because the heavy soaps are removed from the waste stream.

HGI Richmond has reduced water usage by more than 100,000 gallons through installation of low flow shower heads and their linen program that allows guests to decide if they don't want their linens changed every day. Energy usage has decreased by 750,000 kwh, bringing their carbon footprint reduction to 25%. All of HGI Richmond's environmental programs are tracked using the Light Stay program. This helps the hotel see just how much energy and water they have saved through their various reduction efforts.

As a part of HGI Richmond's sustainability program, they have made it their goal to reach out to the community and assist with environmental causes and projects. As part of Keep Virginia Beautiful's 60th Anniversary campaign in 2013, which challenged businesses and citizens to

“Give 60” minutes of their time towards recycling, clean-ups, and beautification of Virginia, HGI Richmond teamed up with a local elementary school. On Earth Day, 2013, children from Fox Elementary in Richmond, Virginia attended an assembly that was hosted by students playing the parts of *Janet Planet* and *The Lorax* where they learned all about why it is important to recycle. Students and teachers played a recycling trivia game entitled “Are You Smarter than a Lorax?” At the end of the Earth Day Celebration, the school announced their new school-wide recycling program that they would be starting, with the help of 55 new recycling containers that were donated by HGI Richmond. These new containers made it possible for every classroom, the cafeteria, and all activity rooms to have a clearly marked blue recycling container.

Evaluation of the Process

There were many challenges to starting the composting program, but the biggest issue to overcome was getting the initial buy-in across the board, from the corporate leaders to the team that makes it happen daily, everyone needed to be on board for the program to be successful. This obstacle was overcome through training and education, as well as persistence. It is an ongoing effort. The sustainability programs are discussed regularly during in-services and new employee orientations. Keeping everyone involved in the program and reminding them that it is the right thing to do is an important part of the ongoing process, especially because trash fees haven't reduced as much as expected. Getting the message out there on a regular basis helps keep the momentum going for the program.

Through the process of implementing the composting program, HGI Richmond has learned that there can be benefits from implementing environmentally friendly practices beyond just cost savings. HGI Richmond has received a lot of positive public relations for their efforts to go “above-and-beyond” what is required of them. Many groups and associations want to use a facility that is working to improve their sustainable efforts because it is in line with their own sustainability efforts.

There are ongoing challenges that HGI Richmond addresses as they arise, such as cost of supplies, training of new staff, and re-training of existing staff, to ensure that the hotel doesn't slip into a noncompliant practice. Training and communication on this happens regularly. As with many composting programs, the hotel has also dealt with fruit fly issues by adding a fly light in the collection area.

One of the areas that HGI Richmond believes they could have done more from the start is to better track their results. Having concrete numbers to back up a program is key to providing feedback to the team that is implementing it as well as management that is approving funds for the program. This type of data is also beneficial to keep seeing the big picture of the project, which is that each individual's efforts are adding up to a larger positive environmental impact. Now that HGI Richmond has the Light Stay program, they are able to keep up with tracking the benefits of their numerous sustainability programs and they are able to use this information in their compliance reporting to Hilton.

Continual Improvement of the Program

In the future, HGI Richmond plans to continue to work with Virginia Green, RVA Green, and the new Virginia Green Travel Alliance for ideas and best practices to continually improve their sustainability efforts. They also plan to put a garden and rain barrel in the atrium of the hotel in conjunction with the Richmond Technical Center's Horticulture Students. This project will begin in 2014 and it aims to provide a hands-on educational experience for the students and add to the sustainability profile of HGI Richmond. HGI Richmond won a \$1000 grant from Hilton to give to the Richmond Technical Center to help implement this project.

As part of the constant effort to make the program better, HGI Richmond will continue to communicate its efforts to other hotels in Richmond and around the state to encourage participation in sustainability programs. In addition to reaching out to other hotels, they will also continue working with and assisting the community in an effort to educate everyone on the importance of being green and pursuing programs that will have a positive effect on the community and the environment. The General Manager at HGI Richmond sits on the Virginia Green Travel Alliance as well as the Richmond 2015 Hospitality Committee. Ideas are also exchanged at quarterly meetings of local General Managers.