

Water Conservation in the Hospitality Industry

by Randy Childers

Good afternoon. I am pleased to be here today representing the Atlanta hotel community. Last fall, in response to the drought conditions in Georgia, the Atlanta Hotel Council requested that the engineering directors of the largest downtown hotels convene to share best practices for water conservation, collect information to assist hotels in assessing their water usage and propose recommendations for water conservation to the members of the Atlanta Hotel Council and Georgia Hospitality and Lodging Association. As Chairman of this Committee, I was asked to share some of this information with you today.

As we began to share data and compare notes, one thing quickly became apparent. Water conservation has been high on our list of priorities for quite some time. We have had a strong financial incentive to conserve and reduce consumption. We have seen a pretty dramatic increase in our cost of water in the Atlanta area. Mayor Franklin earlier alluded to this quite frankly, and we have been very much impacted. Utilities are a major part of our operating costs and our water and sewer costs are a major component of that expense, with those costs rising dramatically. We all understand why the increases were necessary, and we support the Mayor and the City Council in their efforts to address our infrastructure issues, but attendant to those rate increases, the financial incentives to conserve were compelling.

The response of the hotel industry is reflected in a decrease in by the average annual consumption in gallons per occupied room of the five largest downtown hotels which has been quite significant. We are very pleased that we've been able to respond to these necessities and mutually did so without collaboration or knowledge of our independent actions to this end. It wasn't until this last Fall when we began to compare notes that we saw that we had all been reacting in similar ways. I would be lying if I told you that this response wasn't largely driven by the financial impact, but I do know that certainly on behalf of Hyatt—for whom I work—we have had a long time commitment to reduce our consumption for all the good reasons we are here today to discuss.

So now comes a drought of historic proportions and the need to reduce our consumption even further. Although much of the low fruit has been picked, once we began to compare notes, we could see that we were all taking similar actions to reduce our water use. You can see that there is nothing terribly dramatic here; they are largely things that we ought to do and which you have heard much about today. So in the interest of time, I won't go through them step by step. Some of the additional measures that we are implementing: we're doing a lot to reduce our exterior landscaping and use more appropriate landscape material; we are mulching; for irrigation, we're looking at ways to use water which otherwise would be wasted, such as air conditioning condensation recovery; we are also hoping to add infrastructure to allow us to more effectively collect rainwater, for use in both irrigation, and our cooling towers. There are some operational things we can do, as well. I see the Georgia Aquarium is doing exactly the same thing that all of us are doing, and that is setting water stations rather than having pitchers of water at every table. We are also serving water only on request at restaurants. In attempt to save water, we are no longer washing glasses for the guest rooms, and we are using disposable cups. The latter is a mixed issue, environmentally, and we understand that. There are other simple things we are doing such as eliminating the

practice of using running water to thaw frozen food and blitzing the hotel, looking for leaks. You know this is really simple stuff—the sort of thing that you might do on a Saturday afternoon around the house to improve your use of water—but we are doing it on a large scale; examining all of our practices for ways to save.

One of the things that we recommended to one another is that we look at our laundry operations. Hyatt Regency Atlanta outsourced their laundry in 2001, our water consumption dropped by 23%. Now, yes, somebody else is still doing it, but we have displaced it to an operation which is much, much more efficient than what we could ever be in their consumption, in that they are able to use highly efficient, tunnel wash equipment. They are very much more efficient than we could be, in our limited footprint. We are not in the laundry business—we're in the hotel business, and lack the equipment and expertise to operate at peak efficiency—so we went to folks that can do it smarter and more efficiently than we can.

A big part of our conservation effort is just educating our staff about good practices. Some other initiatives we are taking: We have begun the process of installing ultra low flow toilets—1.28 gallon per flush. The engineering on the new fixtures is very good and they operate very well at much lower consumption. Installation of waterless urinals. I see that the Aquarium has led the way on this effort and I know that Ciannat, with Emory, has shown us that they have been successful with their installations. We are going to follow their lead. Installation of cistern systems, as mentioned earlier, is something we are hoping to do, though the capital costs are significant, and that's probably down the road a little bit.

At Hyatt Regency Atlanta looking we are also looking at major renovations of our central plant for efficiencies. One of our other initiatives is making our guests aware of what our efforts are on their and the community's behalf, and engaging them in that process of helping us conserve. To that end, the Atlanta Hotel Council and Georgia Hotel and lodging produced this piece which we have placed in guest rooms. We are all on the same page in asking our guests to take shorter showers, turning off the water in the sink when they are not using it, and re-hanging their towels for re-use. Just really simple stuff that they can do that has a significant impact. So, those are some of the things we in the hotel community are doing. I very much appreciate your attention. Thank you.