

Corporate Travel Planners Look for Specifics on Hotel Sustainability Efforts

Recycling, Water Usage, Carbon Footprint Among Key Data Points

By [**Laura Koss-Feder**](#)

HNN contributor

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As the world grapples with weather extremes ranging from intense heat to torrential storms to dangerous droughts, business travelers want to know that when they stay at a particular hotel there are some efforts to promote sustainability.

Today's travel planners don't just want environmental platitudes from hotels when seeking proposals for corporate travel agreements. They are looking for metrics on reducing carbon footprints, water usage, recycling and other areas.

"We believe this is a new era of travel, and sustainable travel is becoming an increasingly important consideration for travel planners as business travel returns," Jean Garris Hand, Hilton's vice president of global environmental, social and governance, said. "When customers choose Hilton to host their events, they're looking for a partner to help them create meaningful change in the attendee experience and also drive positive impact for the environment and in the communities they visit."

Companies want to see specifics from hotels in their environmental programs, and they are looking for measurable data associated with these initiatives. Hilton, for example, has LightStay, a proprietary tool that tracks environmental and social impact. Its Meeting Impact Calculator tool gives event planner customers the opportunity to see an estimated carbon footprint for their events using each hotel's specific utility and emissions data, she said.

Many customers may be trying to reduce the carbon footprint of their events through things like carbon neutral meetings, Hand said. Many of the brand's properties participate in its Carbon-Neutral Meeting program, in which Hilton will offset the carbon footprint of the customers' event by securing carbon credits on its customers' behalf. The footprint of all business events with 10 or more delegates at participating hotels will be offset through carbon credits.



Corporate clients want to see properties like the Hyatt Place Huntsville/Research Park in Alabama focus on efforts in the areas of water conservation, energy efficiency, carbon emissions, and waste reductions. (McNeill Hotel Co.)

Credits will be allocated to a range of projects which support Hilton's Travel with Purpose 2030 Goals, including repairing and maintaining boreholes in Rwanda to increase access to safe water sources, the construction of a geothermal power plant in Turkey to generate clean, emissions-free energy, and the development and maintenance of wind farms in India, she noted.

At the Hilton Pensacola Beach hotel in Florida, for example, there is a 25% increase in requests during the RFP process to ensure green efforts are in place, said Stephanie Barbee, director of sales.

Within the past quarter, she said three organizations asked her to provide green initiative information to ensure the client that he or she is partnering with someone who is aligned with a company mission to become carbon neutral.

"Many requests are to validate we have recycling efforts, and that we are implementing environmental best practices and being mindful of waste," Barbee said.

Sustainability efforts continue to be very important with hotel clients, who are looking for information like carbon, recycling, and hotel water usage, pointed out Jennifer Barnwell, president of the Curator Hotel & Resort Collection. Potential clients are asking for specifics, such as what a hotel's average carbon emissions are per room night, if a property is LEED or BREEAM certified, and if a hotel is certified by programs such as Green Key, Green Seal, Green Globes, Green Mark, Green Check, Travel Life or Earth Check. They also want to know what a hotel's average water use per room night is.

"The [Curator] hotels do speak to their green initiatives and create sustainability committees to address the issues above," Barnwell said. Corporate clients "want to see that at least some sustainable and environmentally-focused efforts are in place, and that it's top of mind for the hotel and its team."

Corporate clients are looking for hotel operators that focus on environmental efforts in four key areas: water conservation, energy efficiency, carbon emissions and waste reductions, said Travis Murray, president of the McNeill Hotel Co.

They want to see hotel management practices that save on the use of water, provide energy efficient accommodations. and provide energy efficient event venues.

"This is extremely important as we continue to progress from the pandemic." Murray noted. "We know that business travel supports economic growth as it brings people together across national boundaries, and companies want to be able to do this while doing what is right for society and the environment."

Ashley Manley, director of sales at Fairfield by Marriott San Diego North/San Marcos in California, agreed, citing specifics being asked for by corporate travel planners.

"Sustainability inquiries posed to hotel salespeople are direct quantitative questions like: what is the carbon per room-night measurement in kilograms, what is the water

per room-night in liters, what is the energy intensity of the hotel, and what is the waste diversion rate," she said. "The best thing a hotel can do is to have collaborative operations and sales teams that educate each other about sustainability measures and how they factor into the sales process."

Being certified by a third-party, globally-recognized organization, like LEED, is important because it guarantees that certain standards are met. If a hotel cannot become certified, corporate buyers want to at least be able to check that the hotel management company has its own responsibility program and objectives, she added.

"From the top down, companies are now encouraging travelers to make environmentally conscious travel decisions, even including emissions data in their internal booking tools. Many corporate travelers want to make considerate choices to reduce their impact on the environment as much as they are able to," Manley said.

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