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# **KNOW-HOW**

**Green Meetings and Events**

## WHAT IS A GREEN MEETING?

A “green” or sustainable meeting “is one designed, organised and implemented in a way that minimises negative environmental impacts and leaves a positive impact for the host community”, says the Green Meeting Guide, published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). A sustainable event should:

- Minimise greenhouse gas emissions, including CO<sub>2</sub>, and compensate for unavoidable emissions;
- Minimise natural resource consumption and adapt demand to local supply;
- Avoid waste generation where possible and reuse/recycle remaining waste;
- Protect biodiversity, water, air and soil resources;
- Allow the local community to benefit economically, socially and environmentally;
- Encourage local sustainable development; and
- Increase the awareness of sustainability issues among participants, staff, service providers and the local community.



Despite pressure on businesses and organisations to cut costs, planners are increasingly being asked to minimise the impact of a meeting or event. This trend reflects:

- The growing demand by consumers, stakeholders and investors to see more responsible behaviour;

- The rise in government incentives for businesses to reduce their carbon footprints; and
- More organisations finding that green and CSR (corporate social responsibility) practices can save them money and strengthen the bottom line.
- Increase the awareness of sustainability issues among participants, staff, service providers and the local community.

The meetings and events industry is huge. In the US alone, it is worth \$907 billion—making it the 10th biggest industry in the US—with hotels overwhelmingly the venue of choice, hosting 1.5 million events, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers February 2011 report. The 2010 UK Events Market Trends Survey, commissioned by the UK’s meetings industry body Eventia, estimates the UK industry is worth £18.8 billion with hotels accounting for 61% of business events.

The meeting and event industry’s impact on the environment is even bigger, with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) naming meetings and events as the second most wasteful industry after building and construction. The 2008 report *The Economy and the Environment: One Solution for Two Meeting and Event Industry Issues*, by environmental meetings planning company Meetings Strategies Worldwide, presented the stark evidence, claiming that an average conference participant, over the course of a three-day meeting, generates about 28kg (61lbs) of waste, compared to 6kg (13.5lbs) at home over the same period, and produces 640kg (1,142lbs) of greenhouse gases in just three days (from flight and road miles getting to and from the event, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the venue and hotel stay), the equivalent amount produced by driving a car for a month at home.

## WHY GREEN YOUR MEETINGS AND EVENTS?

### It’s good for business

With corporations acknowledging that sustainability makes good business sense, and trade and professional organisations and government-owned enterprises increasingly required to meet strict green criteria, event planners are seeking to incorporate more sustainable practices into their meetings, conferences and other events. In their request for proposals (RfPs), event planners are asking about a venue’s green credentials, giving preference to those venues that can show a clear commitment to sustainability. According to *FutureWatch 2010*, an in-depth report compiled by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and American Express, 76% of meeting planners in Europe, Middle East and Africa reported that CSR will be a focus for their organisations (63% in the US). And a 2009 *EventView* survey found that 66% of planners will or had already implemented green initiatives. If hotels do not capitalise on these opportunities, they will lose out on a share of this lucrative market



#### It's good for the environment

If a five-day event serves 2,200 people breakfasts, lunches and receptions using china instead of plastic disposables, it prevents 860kg of plastic from going into a landfill, according to figures taken from the 2008 Meetings Strategies Worldwide report. The report also calculated that by not pre-filling water glasses at tables during three days of served lunches for 2,200 attendees, 2,000 litres of water could be saved.

#### It improves your reputation

Green meetings demonstrate your hotel's commitment to sustainability in a very public way

#### It reduces costs

While, in the short term, there may be costs for example, for educating staff and suppliers, buying organic food, investing in the local community the longer-term impact should result in cost savings thanks to improved efficiency through the consumption of fewer resources (energy, bottled water, paper, etc.) and the reduction in waste produced. "Many people believe adding environmental and sustainable options will be significantly more expensive," says Emma Wellman, chair of the Association of Event Venues Sustainability Working Group and sustainability advisor at Earls Court and Olympia in London. "Some choices are [more expensive], but others save money, so exhibitors and organisers can balance groups against each other. As more people request sustainable options, this will drive the price down, too."

#### It spreads sustainable best practice

Meetings and other events are a great opportunity to raise awareness of sustainability not only among participants but also among staff and the local community. It will also demand higher environmental and social standards of your suppliers.

#### It creates social benefits

You help the local economy by providing jobs and giving business to local suppliers, and by integrating social elements into meetings and events (e.g. volunteering), you develop stronger relationships with the community.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR HOSTING SUCCESSFUL "GREEN" MEETINGS

- 1. Establish a "green" business culture.** Without long-term strategic commitment from managers, a company's sustainability policies are likely to have little credibility or impact. Only by creating a deeply rooted company culture that encourages all staff to pursue energy-efficient, waste-minimisation and ethical practices, will a hotel reach its meetings and events sustainability goals. This will save energy and costs over its lifespan.
- 2. Awareness-raising.** Make staff, service providers and participants aware of the reasons for your sustainability objectives. To be motivated to implement these, everyone needs to know why reducing their environmental and social impact is important. Communicate all aspects of a sustainable meeting event so that all involved, from the host company to participants, know and are proud about the achievements and results, and ensure success and a lasting legacy by providing information before, during and after the meeting.
- 3. Measurement, monitoring and reporting.** Measuring the environmental footprint and quantifying the achievements of the meeting is not only essential to build credibility but is more often required by investors and other stakeholders to support claims that its meetings are "green". Collect quantitative data on key aspects such as energy consumed and reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, waste generated, including the percentage reused, recycled and composted and hours invested in community service. Base these figures on the number of participants and the duration of the event or compare it to a benchmark. Note that benchmarking across brands, locales and property types can be a challenge in establishing a "fair" range as consumption varies widely due to factors unique to each hotel, including climate, hotel size,



amenities and occupancy rate. Evaluate the results in terms of what did and did not work and what needs improving, and share with stakeholders.

- 4. Procurement.** Those responsible for procurement must consider how to minimise the environmental impacts (and maximise the social benefits) of the products and services purchased for the meeting or event, from energy suppliers to tea and coffee, stationery and office equipment. Inform potential suppliers of your green objectives and criteria and establish their commitment to CSR through codes of conduct and a contract, etc. and allows a single user to access several physical
- 5. Seek advice.** Talk to staff, suppliers and event organisers about how they think you can be more sustainable. If required, seek professional advice from sustainable-events professionals, meeting and events industry associations—such as the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) [www.greenmeetings.info](http://www.greenmeetings.info)—or refer to online and printed resources, including UNEP’s Green Meeting Guide.

## WHAT WILL AN EVENT PLANNER WANT TO KNOW?

For an idea of the type of criteria an event planner will want to consider when organising an event, see the green events checklist (published by Meetings & Events Australia ([www.meetingsevents.com.au/downloads/Green%20Business%20flyer\\_press.pdf](http://www.meetingsevents.com.au/downloads/Green%20Business%20flyer_press.pdf)), a national organisation dedicated to promoting professionalism and excellence in meeting management. It covers everything from choosing a venue accessible to public transport to recycling facilities for participants and delegates. Or look at the questionnaire, which the US EPA encourages all federal agencies to use when soliciting meeting and conference facilities, and which covers everything from the venue’s policy on recycling and linen/towel re-use to public transport access, water conservation and energy-efficient policies.

Event planners will typically look at a hotel’s environmental commitment and performance in the following areas:

### Accommodation

Do guest rooms have automatic controls for the HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning), low-voltage lighting, low-flow taps, showerheads and toilets, a re-use towel and sheet service, recycling bins in rooms, and “green” amenities, such as soap and shampoo, dispensed in bulk and/or in recyclable packaging?

### Food and drink

Is water provided in pitchers or reusable containers rather than plastic bottles, is surplus food donated to local food shelters or food

banks, do menus use local, seasonal and sustainable produce wherever possible?

### Location and transport to/from the destination

Are hotels close to public transport options, is entertainment and shopping accessible on foot or by public transport, does the hotel use hybrid vehicles to pick up guests, are shops and entertainment accessible on foot or by public transport?

### Meeting facilities

Are recycling bins provided in meeting rooms, is registration electronic and are reusable signage and name badges provided, is the venue powered by renewable energy, does it use as much natural light and ventilation as possible, are air conditioning/heating and lights switched off when not in use?

### Operation and management

Does the hotel have a CSR policy, is there a person in charge of CSR policy and/or does the hotel publish a CSR report? An event planner may also want to know how your hotel implements CSR standards in the supply chain. Event planners may also ask whether a venue will offset the carbon emissions created by the event. NH Hoteles, for example, as part of its Ecometing initiative, offers the event organiser the option of offsetting the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced before, during and after the meeting, for a small fee. The hotel group will contribute to a fund supporting projects to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, such as solar energy or hydro-electric power, and an official certificate is issued guaranteeing that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have been offset.

## GREEN MEETINGS CHECKLIST

See below for the areas that you will need to consider and for which information may be requested by an event planner to demonstrate that your hotel can deliver meetings and events with a minimal impact on the environment:

### General

- Green recognition/accreditation
- Measuring and monitoring
- Communication of sustainability
- External partnerships
- Staff sustainability training
- Recruitment policy

- Hotel vehicles/access to public transport and/or facilities

## Office procedures

- Digital communication/registration
- Paper policy
- Energy-efficient equipment



## Energy supply and efficiency

- Lighting
- Sensors
- HVAC

## Environmental purchasing

- Cleaning products
- Food and drink
- Bathroom amenities

## Water conservation

- Linen/sheet re-use
- Fixtures
- Leak detection system

- Drinking water

## Waste minimisation

- Recycling for general waste, surplus food, plastic, tins, glass
- Provision of recycling bins
- Amenity dispensers
- Packaging policy

## Transport

- Hotel vehicles available for guest pick-up
- Public transport accessibility

**Note:** In certain regions of the world, some “green” products or services will not be available. If they are not, you will be asked to prove that you are sourcing as sustainably as you can. .

## RAISING SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS



After years of vague definitions of what makes a “green” meeting, the industry has been pushing for standards to help organisers and venues, including hotels, improve the sustainability of their events. As with all standards, they are only as good as their adoption and acceptance but, says Michael Luehrs, sustainability services manager of MCI Group, an international association, communication and event management company, the smart hotels will apply the new standards and become leaders in adopting these practices and even seek



certification. The standards (most of them due to be published soon) are:

### **BS8901**

Established by the British Standards Institution, this event management system provides requirements for planning, managing and reviewing sustainable events of all types and sizes. It defines key requirements, including venue selection, operating procedures, claiming carbon neutrality, supply chain management, procurement and communications. The Radisson Blu Hotel, Krakow, Poland, is the first and so far only hotel in the world to have been certified with the BS8901 standard.

### **ISO20121**

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is using the BS8901 standard as the basis for the development of ISO20121, a fully internationally recognised sustainability standard, to which all standards bodies have been invited to participate. Currently over 30 countries are involved together with leading sector associations. The release of the ISO20121 is planned for early 2012.

### **APEX Green Meeting Standards**

An initiative for best practice led by the Convention Industry Council's Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX), Environmental Protection Agency, Green Meeting Industry Council, and ASTM International, one of the largest voluntary standards development organisations in the world. When approved, it will provide accredited standards in nine areas, including communications, destinations, exhibits, food and beverage, audio/visual and production, meeting venue, on-site offices and transportation.

### **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)**

The GRI produces the most widely used standards for sustainability reporting. It is currently developing guidelines for event organisers, due to be agreed in 2012, which will inform reporting guidance on the impact of an event and provide common Key Performance Indicators. Some of the areas covered include the economic impact and legacy of events, commissions and gifting, accessibility, inclusivity, sourcing, site selection and the bidding process.

## **NEW TRENDS IN GREEN MEETINGS**

### **Integration of social and community programmes**

The social aspect of CSR is viewed by event planners as an increasingly important part of meetings and events and reflects people's growing desire to leave a positive legacy on the destination they visit. It is generally agreed now that emotional, rather than rational, elements foster the engagement of participants. Hotel groups should be taking note of this trend, building on their existing partnerships with conservation and other local charities to provide event planners with interesting options for community activities. It is important that the hotel has already developed strong local

partnerships to make these options credible. InterContinental Hotels Group's Insider Collection, for example, is a global meeting initiative designed to offer delegates activities that draw on the hotels' unrivalled local knowledge and partnerships. The InterContinental Bali, for example, offers activities such as beach-cleaning, releasing turtle hatchlings into the sea or lunch at a small local restaurant, where recipes have been handed down through the generations. At Presidente InterContinental Resort & Spa in Cozumel, Mexico, participants can collect rubbish for recycling or spend the afternoon on the putting green with children from a local shelter.

### **Sharing via social media**

With the trend for effective communication via social media, such as Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube and Facebook, hotels should make the most of these online tools to engage with partners and suppliers on a large scale. A number of social media sites, including imeet.com and meetingsnet.com, allow planners to participate in discussion groups and join special interest groups online. Hotels that can establish an online personality, share ideas and participate in online dialogues will reap the benefits of idea sharing, tips and feedback and building connections and engaging the public. Hotels are already starting to do this. For example, Marriott International has communicated its sustainable meeting policies via YouTube. Also, look out for the increasing number of meeting-oriented mobile applications (apps) for your smartphone—see <http://meetingapps.com>.



### **Reducing carbon emissions from buildings**

With over 40% of global emissions originating from the built environment, technical infrastructure efficiency projects have the capability to reduce global carbon emissions by over a third in the next 20 years, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council's Leading the Challenge on Climate Change report. Hotel management companies and developers should take this into consideration when planning new builds and retrofits.

### **Measurement and reporting**

Return on investment is increasingly demanded by those who spend on meetings, which means there will be a growing demand and requirement for hotels to provide measurement

disclosure, certification and balanced reporting for the meetings and events it hosts

### Hybrid events

Many meetings and events are now successfully incorporating virtual elements, which means hotels need to keep up with the latest state-of-the-art technologies, such as telepresence and holography and Eyeliner from Musion, which uses high-definition video projection to allow remote moving images to appear to be live on stage. These systems will increasingly be called upon by event organisers for hybrid events. As well as saving on the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that would otherwise be generated by getting participants to the venue, it makes meetings more inclusive and accessible to people wherever they are. Starwood Hotels & Resorts has installed teleconference-meeting facilities using Cisco TelePresence at various hotels, including Sheraton on the Park in Sydney and its European Le Méridien properties in Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and Munich.

## SIDE PANELS: SHARING BEST PRACTICE

### 1. Starwood Hotels & Resorts

The Sustainable Meetings Overview from Starwood integrates environmental and social responsibility into the meeting process. It covers five core areas:

#### Paperless meeting planning

Electronic sales tools are offered, including menu selection and reservation crosscheck, to save paper.

#### Sustainable meeting services

These include using post-consumer recycled paper products and double-sided printing, recycled content paper flip charts, LED signage and white boards, potted plants/organically grown flowers, green transport and recycling bins.

#### Sustainable food and beverage planning

China services rather than disposable products, condiments in bulk dispensers to reduce waste, eco-alternatives to bottled water and the option to donate leftover food.

#### Socially conscious activities

Team-building and/or volunteer activities for delegates to give back to the local community.

#### Impact assessment tools

A Meeting Impact Report demonstrates the environmental impact of the meeting. It provides key indicators based on energy and water savings; waste management (including recycling, composting, material selection and reuse);

sustainable food choices; and volunteer programmes offered.

For more details, visit [www.starwoodhotels.com](http://www.starwoodhotels.com) (please update)

### 2. Fairmont Hotels & Resorts

The Eco-Meet Programme helps meeting planners by providing a green meeting structure that encourages minimum waste and environmental awareness for delegates. The scheme offers event planners options tailored to their individual eco-needs, covering four main areas: Eco-Accommodation, Eco-Cuisine, Eco-Service and Eco-Programming

- Eco-Accommodation offers recycling bins, optional sheet and towel replacement, energy-efficient lighting, water-conserving showerheads, toilets and tap aerators.
- Eco-Cuisine menus incorporate local, seasonal and organically grown foods wherever possible.
- Eco-Service provides “disposable-free” food and drink services e.g. china and linen napkins instead of disposal items, edible/organic centrepieces or silk flowers, white boards rather than paper flip charts, and recycling stations in meeting rooms.
- Eco-Programming provides a keynote address, a full-day team-building eco-experience, a dedicated TV channel to provide information and updates to delegates, paperless check-in/check-out and e-mailed contracts and information where possible. They will also assist planners to offset their event’s greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing greet tags/energy certificates. For more information, visit [www.fairmontmeetings.com](http://www.fairmontmeetings.com).

### 3. Scandic Hotels

The Eco-Meet Programme helps meeting planners by providing a green meeting structure that encourages minimum waste and environmental awareness for delegates. The scheme offers event planners options tailored to their individual eco-needs, covering four main areas: Eco-Accommodation, Eco-Cuisine, Eco-Service and Eco-Programming

- Meeting room and breakout area with large windows, providing sufficient natural daylight.
- Participants encouraged to travel by train, public bus, car or eco-car. For those who travelled by air or car (13,000km), carbon offsets were purchased.
- Lunch was 100% organic and the majority of the dinner buffet was organic and locally produced. All the wine and beer was organic.

- China and linen rather than paper used for waste minimisation.
- Electronic communication with delegates.
- Fruits and vegetables served as table decorations before they were eaten. Waste sorting in meeting room. For more information, visit [www.scandichotels.com](http://www.scandichotels.com)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Michael Luehrs, Sustainability Services Manager, MCI Group.**

[www.mci-group.com](http://www.mci-group.com)

### **APEX**

[www.conventionindustry.org/StandardsPractices/APEX.aspx](http://www.conventionindustry.org/StandardsPractices/APEX.aspx)

### **BSI**

[www.bsigroup.co.uk/](http://www.bsigroup.co.uk/)

**The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES)**

[www.ceres.org](http://www.ceres.org)

**Convention Industry Council (CIC)**

[www.conventionindustry.org](http://www.conventionindustry.org)

**Copenhagen Sustainable Meetings Protocol**

[www.visitdenmark.com/international/en-gb/menu/mice/news/csmp/](http://www.visitdenmark.com/international/en-gb/menu/mice/news/csmp/)

**Environmental Protection Agency**

[www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings)

**Global Reporting Initiative**

[www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org)

**Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC)**

[www.greenmeetings.info](http://www.greenmeetings.info)

**Meetings & Events Australia**

[www.meetingsevents.com.au](http://www.meetingsevents.com.au)

**Meeting Strategies Worldwide**

[www.meetingstrategiesworldwide.com](http://www.meetingstrategiesworldwide.com)

**NH Hoteles**

[www.nhhotels.com](http://www.nhhotels.com)

**Professional Convention Management Association**

[www.pcma.org](http://www.pcma.org)

**Starwood Hotels & Resorts**

[www.starwoodhotels.com](http://www.starwoodhotels.com)

**United Nations Environment Programme's Green Meeting Guide**

<http://www.uneptie.org/scp/sun/facility/reduce/gmg/>

**World Travel & Tourism Council**

[www.wttc.org](http://www.wttc.org)

## FURTHER READING

**ASTM International**

[www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org)

**Blue Green Meetings**

[www.bluegreenmeetings.org](http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org)

**Center for Exhibition Industry Research**

[www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org)

**Cisco**

[www.cisco.com](http://www.cisco.com)

**Cvent**

[www.cvent.com](http://www.cvent.com)

**Eventia**

[www.eventia.org.uk](http://www.eventia.org.uk)

**FutureWatch 2011**

[http://www.mpiweb.org/Portal/Research/FutureWatch?utm\\_campaign=FutureWatch2011&utm\\_medium=press%20release&utm\\_source=MPI&utm\\_content=downloadonline](http://www.mpiweb.org/Portal/Research/FutureWatch?utm_campaign=FutureWatch2011&utm_medium=press%20release&utm_source=MPI&utm_content=downloadonline)

**Gulf Incentive, Business Travel and Meetings Exhibition (GIBTM)**

[www.gibtm.com](http://www.gibtm.com)

**IMEX**

[www.imex-frankfurt.com](http://www.imex-frankfurt.com)

**International Organization for Standardization**

[www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)

**MeetingsNet**

[www.meetingsnet.com](http://www.meetingsnet.com)

**Musion Eyeliner**

[www.eyeliner3d.com](http://www.eyeliner3d.com)