

## Recycling and Green Purchasing at the Comfort Inn & Suites, St. Johnsbury, Vermont

Offering recycling to its guests and staff, and expanding green purchasing have allowed the [Comfort Inn & Suites](http://www.vermontvacationland.com/) to reduce its environmental footprint, respond to guest requests, and to be recognized as a Green Hotel through the [Green Hotels in the Green Mountain State Program](http://www.vtgreenhotels.org) (also known as the Vermont Green Hotels Program).

In April 2009, the Comfort Inn agreed to work with the [Northeast Recycling Council \(NERC\)](http://www.nerc.org), the Vermont Green Hotels Program, and [EPA New England](http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/region1.html) to initiate a recycling program and to increase and document its green purchasing efforts. These efforts further supported the Hotel's environmentally conscious business practices and made it recognized as a Green Hotel in the State of Vermont.



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### Facts at a Glance

- The Comfort Inn, located in St. Johnsbury, has 107 guest rooms and is the largest hotel in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.
- The Hotel is now recognized as a Green Hotel in the Vermont Green Hotels program.
- Since April 2009:
  - The Hotel has implemented a comprehensive recycling program and has collected more than 18 tons of recyclables from its waste stream, and
  - Has increased and documented the use of green products—50% post-consumer recycled content copy paper, 50% - 65% post-consumer recycled content personal care paper products, as well as a line of green cleaners.

### Program Overview

The Comfort Inn & Suites, located in the northeast corner of Vermont, is a well-known establishment to Vermonters and out-of-state travelers for its romantic and spacious guest rooms, as well as its proximity to the State's most famous ski resorts and other outdoor activities in the Northeast

Kingdom. The Hotel attracts many repeat customers, including: business travelers, families, and winter sports enthusiasts.

The Comfort Inn senior management agreed to work with NERC and the Vermont Green Hotels Program to further its environmental awareness and the Hotel's operational sustainability. As part of this working agreement, NERC provided Hotel management and staff with direct technical assistance on recycling and green purchasing issues. The Vermont Green Hotels Program provided assistance on the details and documentation necessary to achieve Green Hotel status, including information on green purchasing, and energy and water efficiency. This collaborative effort led to a successful outcome for the Hotel.

Two goals directed the work with the Hotel. The goals targeted the areas management felt needed the most assistance in order to achieve Green Hotel status. They were:

- Developing a comprehensive recycling program, and
- Assessing and expanding the number of environmentally preferable products used by the Hotel.

### **Recycling Program**

The Hotel had received numerous comments from its guests that the Hotel needed a recycling program. Management was interested in starting the program, but had many questions that they needed answered before implementing recycling. Until then, staff collected redeemable beverage containers on a limited basis.

NERC and the Vermont Green Hotels Program met with management and discussed in detail how a recycling program could work at the Hotel. This discussion led to decisions on the steps needed to develop a comprehensive program. Since the volume of recyclables generated at the Hotel was unclear, it was agreed that a waste sort would be the best strategy for obtaining this information. NERC and staff from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and EPA New England conducted a sort by sifting through one day's worth of trash. By viewing the sorted piles of discards, management and staff were able to get a first-hand look at the types of items that were being thrown away at the Hotel. Each of the piles was also weighed to determine the tonnage of material that could be diverted from its waste stream.

The sort revealed the Hotel's discards to be 42% recyclable. Of these recyclables, paper totaled 23% by weight of the total discards, beverage containers 12% (mostly plastic and aluminum), and food waste was nominal because the Hotel does not have a kitchen or restaurant. Since each bag of sorted trash was labeled with the department from which it was collected, it was easy to determine that the paper was primarily being generated at the front desk, offices, and in the guest rooms; and the beverage containers were being generated in the guest rooms and in public use areas of the Hotel.

Hotel management determined that implementing a comprehensive recycling program that was visible to staff and guests was the best strategy to minimize waste and improve the Hotel's environmental footprint. Management quickly worked on negotiating a recycling contract with the Hotel's waste hauler, as well as purchasing recycling bins for each guest room and for the public use areas. At the same time, NERC began planning a recycling training for the Hotel's cleaning staff. The Director of Environmental Services took the lead on organizing the training and informing staff. The Director also invited the hauler to attend the training so it could provide definitive information on what was recyclable in St. Johnsbury.

The training was conducted by displaying a wide variety of items found in the Hotel's trash on several tables. Staff was asked to browse the items and identify the recyclables by placing a colored sticky note on them. NERC and the hauler then reviewed each item with staff to identify the true recyclables. This hour-long process engaged staff in a lively discussion and enhanced their understanding of single-stream recycling—the type of recycling program that would be implemented at the Hotel.

The management placed recycling bins in each guest room and in public use areas around the Hotel, as well as wrote articles on the Hotel's recycling program in the staff newsletter. Office staff was also instructed to recycle their paper discards instead of throwing them away.

All of the above measures have made recycling visible at the Comfort Inn & Suites to guests and staff. Management and staff's positive attitude about recycling significantly contributed to the Hotel's success in implementing the program. As a result, the Hotel collected 18 tons of recyclables in 26 months, which was 15% of total discards.

### **Green Purchasing**

Part of the required documentation for applying to the Vermont Green Hotels Program is a list of the green products purchased by each hotel. At least three product categories purchased by each hotel must be green to be recognized by the Program. While auditing its inventory for the required paperwork, the Comfort Inn determined that it was purchasing a wide variety of personal care paper products with 50 – 65% post-consumer recycled content and using bulk-metered green cleaners. To further satisfy the Green Hotels Program requirements, the Hotel began purchasing 50% post-consumer copy paper.

### **Challenges & Solutions**

**Challenge:** Knowing where to start in developing a new recycling program.

**Solution:** Senior management allowed NERC and the Vermont Green Hotels Program to assist them with strategizing how to develop and implement a comprehensive recycling program.

**Challenge:** Finding the time for cleaning staff to be trained on the Hotel's recycling program.

**Solution:** Senior management recognized the benefits of recycling for its guests and the environment, and incorporated the time needed for the staff training into scheduled staff meeting time.