

Casino Enterprise Management

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Green Casinos—It's About Time

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Aren't we ready to begin looking wisely at how we use natural resources in our hotels and casinos? Energy, air, water, and building materials are all limited resources. This is a critical time for us to assume responsibility for using these resources efficiently, and building sustainable projects that are in harmony with the environment.

Enthusiastic in our creation of awesome properties, the casino industry has seldom been sensitive to the environment, or the consumption of natural resources. Benefiting from large revenues and profitability, we have had the luxury of being extravagant consumers of water, energy, building materials, and other resources.

Consequences of these past decisions are beginning to show. Las Vegas, the "City of Lights," is experiencing record high energy costs, and Lake Mead, which for years was overflowing, has dropped 60 feet in the past few years. Of course, the casino industry is not the only industry responsible—but we are contributors to a larger, worldwide problem. The cost to our environment and future generations will be great.

In Europe, sustainability has come a long way. America has lagged behind, but we can and should take the lead. Why? We have the opportunity, and it is the right thing to do.

In May 2006 the U.S. Conference of Mayors unanimously adopted the ambitious "2030 Challenge." The resolution calls for an immediate 50 percent reduction in fossil fuel energy consumption in new and renovated buildings.

Casino construction over the past several years has reached an all-time high, supported by the great success of the industry. In the future, instead of building the "old Vegas way," we have the opportunity to build in a new way, with the intention of sustaining our planet for the future.

Happier, Healthier Customers and Employees

Often "green" building practices directly improve health and quality of life for inhabitants. Americans spend 85 to 90 percent of their time indoors. Therefore, it is important to make indoor air quality as good as, or better than, outdoor air.

We should be concerned that our resort and gaming customers and employees, are

happy and healthy while they spend their time on our properties. And, guess what? If we accommodate them in this manner, they are likely to spend more time in our casinos.

By choosing paints, carpeting, sealants, and caulks with low volatile organic compounds (VOCs), employing ventilation strategies by utilizing air filters, controlling moisture to stop dangerous molds, and increasing natural light, we can create a much healthier environment. In fact, many employers report fewer sick days (and higher production) for employees as a result of incorporating these ideas.

When we use products made with recycled materials, we reduce the energy used to produce new products and the pollution caused by their production. In addition, using regional or indigenous building materials also minimizes the energy used and pollution caused by moving products from their source to the construction site.

Further, the need for electric light and cooling can be minimized. By increasing natural light within buildings, using low-E glazing, integrating task lighting, energy efficient lights, and controls that turn off lights when the rooms are not in use, we minimize the need for electric light and cooling.

Cellulose insulation, made from 100 percent recycled paper can be blown into walls to achieve a high thermal efficiency. Many energy efficient buildings have computerized, on-demand hot water systems that greatly reduce energy waste. The use of Photovoltaic Solar Collectors can produce a safe, clean, reliable, and inexhaustible source of electricity.

Today, water is not only a resource, but a commodity, and its ownership is strictly protected. Good quality water has become scarce. Today, people are concerned about drinking tap water. They prefer to drink bottled water even though they often pay the equivalent of \$6 to \$12 per gallon.

By doing all we can to conserve and protect our water, we ensure a better world for those who are going to inherit it. Building sites could include xeriscaping (method for arid climates using water-conserving techniques) with drought resistant, indigenous plantings watered by captured rainwater or gray-water. Unlike solid surface paving, pervious pavers

will allow the site to remain cooler while recharging ground water resources. "Low flow" plumbing fixtures limit unnecessary water use. Using these practices would greatly reduce our water consumption.

A good way of ensuring minimal resource use is building with materials that have a long life and require minimal maintenance. Metal wall panels and roofing systems can extend the life of a building and save the owner money because low maintenance also conserves energy and resources. Metal products with long lives may be re-used, or are 100 percent recyclable.

On the interiors, biodegradable wall coverings are available. For carpets and fabrics, we can choose naturally grown cotton, wool, and silk rather than synthetic fabrics like nylon.

Sustainability Doesn't Cost More

There is a common misconception that sustainability costs more. While in some cases there may be some higher front end costs, the reality is that building green can be less costly than conventional building practices—significantly less when considering maintenance and energy savings over the life of the building.

The examples here are but a few of many solutions to help minimize the demands placed on an already hard-pressed environment by a constantly expanding society. Our resources are finite and diminishing at an alarming rate. If we all do what is possible, in time the earth will heal itself. Conservation of natural resources needs to be an integral part of the development, planning, execution, and operation of every building development.

The responsibility falls on all of us to do the best we can to leave this planet in better shape than it was given to us for future generations.



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