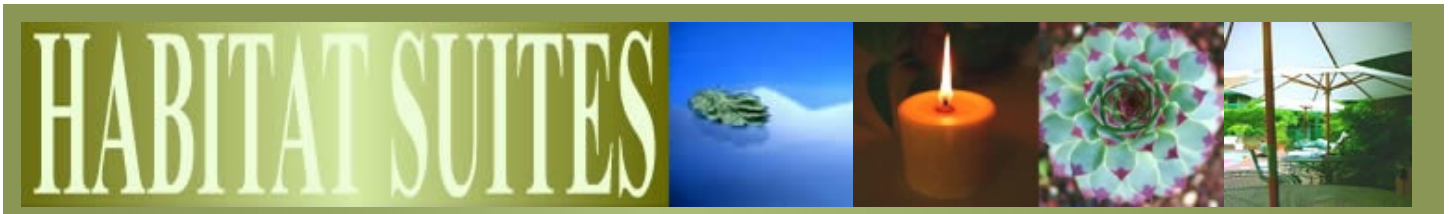


Our Commitment

Ecological Consciousness in Action is Habitat Suites' commitment to creating an environmentally sustainable future for us all.

Environmental Practices

Habitat Suites Hotel opened its doors in May 1985. The hotel was not designed or built with ecological considerations in mind. We had the task of "greening" the hotel after the fact. In 1991, Habitat Suites Hotel hoisted the green flag, and became a charter member of the "Green" Hotels Association, making official our commitment to sustainable management. In 1997, the City of Austin selected Habitat Suites Hotel for its "B.E.S.T. Success" Award in recognition of its "unique & creative business approaches to environmental issues." In 1999 we were awarded Texas' most prestigious environmental honor: the Texas Excellence Award for Small Business. In 2005, we were awarded the Keep Austin Beautiful award for Industry Leadership. In 2006 we received the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce first ever environmental award, the "Greenbelt Award " and in 2007 we were again honored with a second "Greenbelt Award. We continue to get recognition for our programs and to win awards for ecological consciousness action, our commitment to creating an environmentally sustainable future for us all.

This booklet describes most of the programs we have implemented to carry out our commitment to encouraging, promoting, and supporting ecological consciousness. These programs fall into the following categories:

* Air Quality

* Land Use

* Energy Efficiency

* Waste Management & Recycling

* Resource Conservation

* Water Quality & Conservation

* Human Health

* Education

You are welcome to review this document on-line or to print it out for your own use. If you would like, we have printed booklets on-hand and can send you copies, as you need them for specific uses. If you would like to receive a printed booklet for your own use or for educational purposes, please contact us by email give us feedback online or by phone or fax at (512) 467-6000.

Air Quality

* All suites and the Guesthouse are smoke-free

* We use no chemical pesticides, aerosol products, or Styrofoam

* Our housekeeping staff uses water and elbow grease as their main cleaning agents. We use only naturally-scented, non-toxic, phosphate-free, biodegradable cleaning products, including vinegar to clean mirrors, windows and metal fixtures, baking soda to clean refrigerators and stoves, vinegar and salt to clean metal, and linseed oil and lemon oil to polish wood. The primary cleaning agent in our products is orange oil.

* We paint with only non-toxic, water-based paints that contain a minimal amount of adhesives, minimizing the release of volatile organic compounds into the air

* Housekeeping uses negative ion generators and "Ozinators" to clear dust and odors from air

* We provide air cleaners with carbon filters and ionizers to guests on request

* Our staff maintains air ducts monthly

* Live potted plants in each suite and abundant trees on the property keep air healthier and reduce carbon monoxide

* Guesthouse air conditioning brings in fresh air from outside

* Fire extinguishers are metal & refillable. They contain no ozone-destroying ingredients

* The addition of 108 solar photovoltaic cells reduces carbon dioxide by 38,000 pounds each year. This is equivalent to removing 3.8 cars from our roads, or planting 5.3 acres of

land with trees. Since much of Austin's electricity comes from coal plants, significant amounts of NOx, SOx, and mercury will also be avoided.

Land Use

Our gardeners have established a sustainable land-use system to remedy environmental damage, increase and conserve the plant and animal life on our property, and to improve the quality of our land for future generations.

To remedy environmental damage we:

* Use no chemical fertilizers or pesticides

* Add natural agents, such as Medina (a soil activator), seaweed, "manure teas," and colloidal rock phosphates, to improve the soil

* Compost organic landscape trimmings and other materials and return them to the land

* Use no polluting landscape materials, such as creosote-treated railroad ties

* Maintain the wet-weather stream to the East of the property to support plant and wildlife development

To increase and conserve the life on the land, we:

* Incorporate plants of different heights into existing gardens. This practice, called "stacking," increases the number of plants on any given amount of land

* Introduce long-term, slow-release, organic soil enrichments to improve quality of existing soil, so it can nourish additional plants

* Create water gardens to support existing wildlife, such as birds, lizards and frogs, and to attract and support an even larger population of wildlife

* Plant green plants just to feed caterpillars

* Maintain fruits, berries, nuts, herbs and medicinal plants to use in our kitchen and to help feed wildlife

To improve the quality of the land for future generations, we:

* Put in plants that continuously adjust and improve the soil. Specifically, "Fertilizer" plants that add necessary nutrients to the soil

* Plant deep taproot trees like pecans and cedar elms to mine trace minerals from the soil, and rocks and make them available through leaf fall to the other plants

* Plant Crepe myrtle and afghan pines that increase the acidity of our alkaline soils

* Purposely leave certain "weeds" that provide natural plant "medicines" for other plants

* Plant mountain laurels, redbuds, peas, and bluebonnets to harvest nitrogen from the air and make it available for other plants

* Have increased the number of plants that flower in each season to encourage bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects to do the work of cross-pollination

* Use arbors, gates and fencing made from Western Red Cedar, one of the few woods that require no chemical treatment-- it is naturally resistant to rot and insect infestation

Energy Efficiency

Air Conditioning Efficiency

* The suites' windows open to let in the air during our beautiful spring and fall months

* As they need replacement, we install draperies with thermal reflective liners in the suites, to keep rooms naturally cooler

* Suites have increased ceiling insulation

* Roofs have radiant barriers to minimize heat in the summer, and to help retain heat in the winter

* The central roofs have light-colored, reflective surfaces

* Our staff maintains caulking and weather stripping to keep air conditioning & heating inside

* Ductwork for heating and air conditioning is well sealed to prevent energy loss

* We tint suite windows that receive direct sun

* We install energy-efficient air conditioning units, and will continue to do so as units need to be replaced

* Vines in plant trellises and on brickwork reduce energy use for air conditioning and heating

* We have partnered with Austin Energy, our local utility company, to install motion and occupancy sensing thermostats for maximum efficiency, saving 31,250 kW annually

Lighting Efficiency

* In 2003, all interior lighting was changed to compact fluorescent bulbs. This resulted in an annual savings of 81,555 kW each year.

* In 2004, we added two tubular skylights to our meeting room, to bring in natural light

and eliminate the need for electricity during day time hours

* Administrative offices have reduced ambient lighting and increased task lighting, and offices use low-energy fluorescent and halogen bulbs

* We install sheer curtains to allow guests to have both privacy and filtered sunlight, reducing the need for indoor electrical lighting

* Light interior colors decrease light absorption, reducing the need for artificial light indoors

* Housekeeping regularly cleans lighting fixtures, reflectors, bulbs and windows to improve light reflection

* Motion sensors turn lights on and off in the Guest Laundry and Guesthouse lobby restrooms

* Directional fixtures outside prevent the overlap of exterior lighting, reducing "light waste."

* Exterior lighting fixtures have compact fluorescent bulbs. This reduces each bulb from 60 watts to 10 watts, for an estimated energy saving of 88 kilowatts each day, and 32,120 kW each year.

* Reflectors above fluorescent lights focus the light in desired areas without increasing bulb wattage

Appliances that Heat Efficiently

* Hot-water-holding tanks and water pipes are insulated to prevent energy loss

* We maintain and clean water heating equipment regularly to keep them running efficiently

* We maintain hot water temperature between 120 and 130 degrees Fahrenheit, to reduce the energy used by water heaters

Appliances that Cool Efficiently

* Large water containers in the freezers keep freezers cold without as much electricity by reducing the air space that needs to be cooled

* Soft drink machines keep cooler with less electricity when located indoors.

* A “vending miser” on our soft drink machine only comes on when a person is in front of the machine

* The Guesthouse kitchen uses several smaller refrigerators rather than a walk-in to conserve energy

* Our maintenance staff cleans refrigerator coils four times a year

And More . . . . .

* As charter member's of Austin's "Green Choice" program, we get our energy from renewable sources, whenever possible

* The swimming pool filter runs only when the pool is in use

* Habitat Suites follows the American Council for Energy-Efficient Economies' guidelines when replacing suite kitchen appliances

* The housekeeping staff cleans grills and grease filters regularly for greater heat efficiency

* Main electrical circuits are installed with duty cycling timers to lower peak time/energy usage, without disrupting service to our guests

* In June 2007, a solar thermal hot water system was installed which reduced the hotel's dependence on natural gas by 60%

Waste Minimization & Recycling

In the Suites

* We supply 100% recycled bathroom & facial tissue, and paper towels

* Our toilet paper rolls are "coreless." This eliminates the cardboard centers and also allows us to use the roll in its entirety.

* Suite bathrooms use dispensers for personal care products to eliminate small, individual packaging

* Suite kitchens have glass drinking glasses that are sanitized and reused, not disposables.

* Housekeeping collects recycling from each suite's recycling container; guests need not separate types of recyclables to participate in this program

* Habitat Suites donates slightly used or soiled furnishings to non-profit organizations, rather than throwing them away

* We conduct quarterly trash audits to ensure maximum recycling and attention to minimal packaging; we have reduced our "waste" by 30%

* We reuse the same 5 gallon plastic containers for our cleaning supplies. This diverts 125,000 cubic yards of plastic from the recycling stream each year.

In the Guesthouse

* We have eliminated individual packets of condiments, Styrofoam, and plastic tableware

* Cloth napkins grace the dining room; we use 100% recycled paper napkins when cloth is impractical

* We ask food vendors to offer products with minimal packaging, and we purchase food in bulk to reduce packaging waste

* We serve no fried foods, eliminating the need to send oil residue to a landfill

* The kitchen staff uses cotton cloths for cleaning whenever possible; when necessary, they use 100% recycled paper towels; old linens become new cleaning rags

* When a mop gets dirty, housekeeping removes and washes the mop, rather than throwing it out

In the Administrative Offices

* Team members reduce the need for paper by communicating with each other through e-mail, when possible

* Our credit card processing, and night audit work, is “paperless.” This saves not only on paper, but also on toner, toner cartridges, and the trash generated from a “paper” process.

* When we need to print information for in-house exchange, we use the clean side of "used" paper

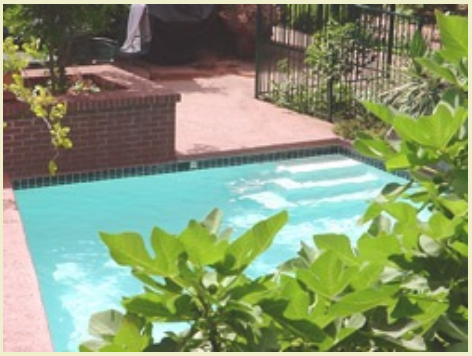
* We print documents of 2 or more pages in length on two sides of each piece of paper

* We return paycheck envelopes to the office for re-use

* We print administrative and promotional materials on recycled paper stock

* We recycle paper, newspaper, cardboard, aluminum, metal, glass and plastics

* Our “waterless” urinal saves roughly 50,000 gallons of water annually



Resource Conservation

Habitat Suites does not purchase furniture made from hardwoods. Recycled plastic curb stops serve our guests in the parking lot.

Water Quality & Conservation

Conservation Indoors

* Suites have low-flow faucet aerators in kitchen and bathroom sinks. This reduces water

flow from 4.5 to 2.0 gallons per minute for estimated water saving of 2800 gallons each day and 1,022,000 gallons each year.

* Suites have water-saving showerheads. This reduces flow from 5 to 2.1 gallons per minute for estimated water saving of 2,880 gallons each day and 1,051,200 gallons each year.

* Suites have water-saving toilets. This reduces water usage from 3.5 to 1.6 gallons per flush for estimated water saving of 730 gallons each day, and 266,300 gallons per year.

* Housekeeping changes linens and towels daily only at the guests' request. Each suite displays written information about this choice.

* We have programmed commercial washers used for hotel laundry to reduce water use

* A “recycle kit” on our commercial washer saves the final rinse water as the first wash cycle of the next load, saving 20 gallons per load, and 350,000 each year

* A new pre-rinse nozzle in our kitchen saves 35,000 gallons of water each year

* Removing the food grinder in our kitchen saves 50,000 gallons of water each year

Conservation on the Grounds

* The irrigation system has water-saving sprinkler heads; our gardeners monitor the system for leaks, and adjust sprinkler orientation as needed to ensure that they are watering only plants.

* Our gardeners have planted drought-tolerant, native Texas plants to reduce the need for water; they have also scheduled watering for nighttime hours. The estimated water savings from this program are 500 gallons each day and 182,500 gallons each year.

* Wherever possible, we have improved drainage to increase the amount of rainwater that reaches plant roots, thus decreasing the need for artificial watering

Improving Water Quality

* We provide guests with biodegradable, 100% natural, vegetable oil-based personal care products with no dyes or artificial scents

* Housekeeping cleans with non-toxic cleaning agents, including laundry products

* Our maintenance staff uses mechanical methods to clear obstructed pipes -- not toxic or corrosive drain cleaners

* We use no toilet tank cleaning tablets or powders

Human Health

* A salt generator for the pool produces sodium chloride and eliminates the use of harmful chlorine tablets

* Our valet dry-cleaning service uses no toxic chemicals

* We choose music in the Guesthouse with thoughtful attention to its soothing qualities

* All of our suites are suitable for those with chemical sensitivity

* “Quiet Hours” from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. reduce the stress caused by noise pollution. An extended time of quiet permits subtle, regenerative experiences: a good night's rest, a quiet conversation, or the pleasant company of one's own thoughts. Signs posted throughout the property remind guests to protect each others' quiet during these hours.

* In the suites and Guesthouse dining room, stainless steel cookware eliminates aluminum from the cooking process

* Our full, buffet breakfast includes healthy options, from low-fat, low-cholesterol dishes to sugar-free, vegan, and macrobiotic choices. If you thrive on pancakes, don't worry, we have them, too.

* Our staff chooses organic over non-organic produce, and local foods without artificial additives, wherever possible

* We offer Kukicha "Twig" tea and herbal teas, as well as shade grown, fair trade coffee, in the dining room

* Our biodegradable, 100% natural, vegetable-oil -based, dye-free personal care products promote healthy skin and hair

* We offer a non-toxic personal pest control product to our guests during their stay, and treat “break-through” episodes immediately to prevent recurrence

Education

We encourage you to take this booklet home with you, read it, refer to it, and share it with your friends, co-workers, and family. It is our hope that you will wish to implement some of these environmental choices in your own homes and businesses.

Continuing Education for Us

We can only implement our "green initiatives" with the full participation of our employees. Therefore, we make an extra effort to involve and educate our employees about the benefits of our environmental programs.

We acknowledge and reward effort and initiative by our employees toward an ever more sustainable future, and we celebrate all change in this direction.

We seek assistance from Austin Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the American Solar Energy Society, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and others, to improve our environmental programs. Our principles serve as a compass whenever we make important choices or solve problems. Life is full of challenges, and we welcome them because they are opportunity for us learn, grow, and improve.

How You Can Help Us?

You can help us learn, grow, and improve by giving us your feedback and suggestions. please call us at our toll free number (800) 535-4663 or give us feedback online.

Thank you for allowing us to make your stay a pleasant one!

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