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From the Lawn to the Restroom, Hotels Find New Ways to Trim Water Usage.

By Klaus Reichardt
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Being high-volume water users - hotels are always looking for new ways to reduce their water consumption especially in areas where water supplies are scarce - such as in large portions of the western United States.

One water-saving method that has become near standard concerns the daily washing of linens and towels. Hotels have begun allowing guests to decide for themselves if their linens and towels can go another day before washing and replacing. Guests can hang up towels for reuse or leave them on the floor to receive freshly washed ones.

Although significant water reductions—and savings—have been attained with this system, many larger facilities are looking for even more ways and newer technologies to help reduce water consumption without sacrificing guest comfort or convenience. Two systems that are being incorporated and explored are xeriscaping and the installation of waterless urinals.

Changing the Landscape

One water-conservation step hotels are taking involves planning landscaping based on water consumption. For instance, the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas was at one time reported to use more water than any other property. It turned out that the amount used in the hotel's guestrooms was actually quite modest. The big culprit was the facility's landscaping.

When the MGM Grand opened in 1993, more than 85 percent of the building's acreage was covered with thirsty lawns and flowering plants. It required the use of more than 60 gallons of water per square foot per year. Today most of these areas have been converted to xeriscaping—landscaping using low-water-consumption desert plants and ground materials. Now, the hotel grounds consume only 20 gallons of water per square foot per year.

The MGM Grand is not the only Las Vegas hotel to incorporate xeriscaping. The Bellagio, world famous for its "front yard" water show, has recently removed more than 20,000 square feet of turf and converted it to rock mulch. The facility has also converted the watering system used on more than 1.5 acres of shrub-landscaped area from overhead spray irrigation systems to drip irrigation. In addition, it has replaced all planters with water-wise landscaping. These measures have helped the property to cut back on landscape watering significantly.

Interest in No-Flush Urinals Increases

In addition to xeriscaping, hotels are also installing no-flush urinals to save water. Before 1989, urinals used about 3 gallons per flush (gpf). This was reduced to about 1.5 gpf with urinals installed after 1989, and today, urinals are required to use about 1 gpf or less for new construction. However, this is still a huge amount of potable water. In fact, it is estimated that just one urinal can use as much as 40,000 gallons of water per year.

This is why waterless urinals are garnering considerable interest in all types of facilities, including hotels. Major hotel companies such as Hilton Hospitality are now installing them in various properties around the world.

These waterless systems have a vertical trap design for better flow-through. The urinals incorporate a cylinder filled with a thin layer of liquid sealant. This trap/cylinder sits atop the drain area of the urinal. Urine passes through the trap and sealant, and as the trap fills, the liquid flows under the barrier layer and into the central tube connected to the conventional drainpipe. This allows the urine to be drained, just like it would in a conventional urinal. The barrier also continuously prevents odors from being released into the restroom.

Waterless units are easy to install because plumbing requirements are minimal. Similarly, water and sewer costs are reduced. Just like no-touch faucets, the units are more hygienic because of their touch-free, no-flush operation.

Concerns and Controversies

Although no one doubts that waterless urinals can save significant amounts of water, some concerns and even controversy have arisen regarding how sanitary and environmentally protective they are. Even though the majority of states in the United States now approve of waterless urinals, these issues continue to linger and