

Energy Star for Hospitality: A Free Government Program Earning its Keep - By Glenn Hasek

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There are currently 247 Energy Star labeled hotels listed on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star for Hospitality website.

Close to 3,000 U.S. hotels have participated in this free government program since it was launched in 2002-mostly hotels in the 200-room range but any property 20 rooms and up can benefit. The two largest hotels that have earned the Energy Star are the Sheraton Waikiki, with 2,228 rooms, and the Sheraton Boston Hotel and Towers with 1,215. The smallest hotels with a label are the 60-room Laurel Super 8 Motel in Laurel, Montana, and the 85-room Saybrook Point Inn and Spa, Old Saybrook, Conn.

With so many hotel rating systems to choose from, why is Energy Star a good choice? Besides the fact that it is free, Energy Star for Hospitality is a proven energy management program that helps hotels measure current energy performance, set goals, and track savings. The system also rewards improvements and has one of the most recognizable 'green' logos around.

Buildings that earn the Energy Star use about 35 percent less energy than average buildings. By following Energy Star guidelines, a company can take control of its energy costs, improve its bottom line and help protect the environment.

'Energy efficiency is associated with the single biggest challenge we have-global climate change,' says Stuart Brodsky, National Program Manager for Commercial Properties for the EPA's Energy Star program.

Letter Confirms Commitment

How does one get started? Hotels interested in pursuing the Energy Star label must first send a letter to the director of Energy Star's Commercial & Industrial Branch. The letter confirms that the hotel is committed to doing the following:

Measuring and tracking the energy performance of the organization's facilities where possible by using tools such as those offered through Energy Star,

Developing and implementing a plan consistent with the Energy Star Energy Management Guidelines to achieve energy savings,

Helping to spread the word about the importance of energy efficiency to staff and the community,

Supporting the Energy Star Challenge, a national call-to-action to help improve the energy efficiency of America's commercial and industrial buildings by 10 percent or more, and

Highlighting achievements with recognition offered through Energy Star.

Hotels participating in Energy Star make a commitment to allocate staff and funding to achieve continuous improvement. This includes appointing an energy director, establishing an energy team and instituting an energy policy. Gathering and tracking data is an important next step and includes the documenting of all energy uses.

Energy star hotels establish a baseline for improvement and the metrics used to measure that improvement. EPA has made this step easier by providing a national energy performance rating system for hotels. The rating system allows one to compare a hotel's performance against similar facilities. By uploading energy and building information to the EPA website, one can determine one's benchmark score on a scale of one to 100. Those buildings that rank in the top quartile of participating buildings based on energy efficiency are eligible for the Energy Star label.

Even though thousands of hotels have participated in the Energy Star for Hospitality program, most have not applied for the Energy Star label. Brodsky says, however, that he is seeing organizations apply now more than ever before.

The Advantages to Benchmarking

According to EPA, benchmarking one's facilities against others allows one to:

1. Categorize current energy use by fuel type, operating division, facility, product line, etc.
2. Identify high performing facilities for recognition and replicable practices.
3. Prioritize poor performing facilities for immediate improvement.
4. Understand the contribution of energy expenditures to operating costs.
5. Develop a historical perspective and context for future actions and decisions.
6. Establish reference points for measuring and rewarding good performance.

An important part of Energy Star for Hospitality is goal setting. Setting clear and measurable goals is critical for understanding intended results, developing effective strategies, and reaping financial gains. The energy director, typically in conjunction with the energy team, establishes goals. Goal setting helps set the tone for improvement and fosters ownership of energy management, motivating staff to carry out the mission to reduce energy consumption. Creating an action plan is also part of a winning strategy. Successful organizations use a detailed action plan to ensure a systematic process to implement energy performance measures. This plan is regularly updated.

The success of any plan, according to EPA, is dependent on the support of all levels of an organization, proper training, and incentives to encourage staff to improve energy performance. Regular evaluation of energy performance and the effectiveness of energy management initiatives allows energy managers to measure the effectiveness of projects and programs implemented, make informed decisions about future energy projects, reward individuals and teams for accomplishments, and document additional savings opportunities as well as non-quantifiable benefits that can be leveraged for future initiatives.

Those organizations that join Energy Star as Partner get assigned a consultant-an account manager to guide the Partner through the program's steps. Through Energy Star, one can participate in educational meetings, receive assistance over the phone, and participate in webinars. Those hotels that excel as part of the Energy Star program can earn EPA and media recognition throughout the year.

Program's Components Found Online

The Energy Star website provides instructions on how to get started, as well as helpful tools for benchmarking and assessment. A Financial Value Calculator presents energy investment opportunities in terms of key financial metrics and a Cash Flow Opportunity Calculator helps decision-makers decide how much equipment can be purchased from the anticipated savings. The Portfolio Manager is an interactive energy management tool that allows one to track and assess energy and water consumption across one's entire portfolio of buildings.

What companies are committed to Energy Star for Hospitality? Marriott International announced this year that more than 85 of its hotels will earn the Energy Star label in 2007. Pat Maher, Senior Vice President, Engineering and Program Management for Marriott, says that company now has more than 200 properties with the Energy Star label and it expects to increase that number by 33 percent in 2008.

'We have benefited from the benchmarking of other hotels by using [Energy Star's] portfolio manager program,' Maher says. 'The program has also helped us in promoting energy conservation awareness with our customers, associates and owners. The Energy Star program is in line with Marriott's goal to reduce its energy consumption.'

Hilton, Starwood and Hyatt brand properties are also represented among the list of 247 hotels with the Energy Star label. Jeff Hanulec, Director of Engineering at the Westin Copley Place Hotel in Boston, has led five hotels through the benchmarking process. He is currently leading an effort to make his hotel more energy efficient.

For those considering participation in Energy Star for Hospitality, Hanulec advises working with an EPA representative to guide one through the program. One good reason to get assistance is the challenge of working one's way through the robust Energy Star for Hospitality website.

'The website is so loaded with information, it can take a while to navigate,' Hanulec says. 'That is why we worked with the EPA here in Boston to learn about the program.'

This article first appeared on the Green Lodging News website. To sign up to receive the weekly Green Lodging News newsletter, go to www.greenlodgingnews.com. Glenn Hasek can be reached at greenlodgingnews@aol.com.

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