

## Choice Modifying New Construction Prototypes to Better Support LEED Criteria - By Glenn Hasek

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With its 10 brands and more than 5,000 hotels open or under development, Choice Hotels International, Inc. is one of the largest hotel franchisors on the planet. As committed as it has been to global growth, Choice has historically not taken the kinds of aggressive environmental stances that some of its competitors have taken. Granted, Choice did convert its Comfort Suites brand to a 100 percent nonsmoking one in 2007, but it has not announced any other major environment-related commitments. That is all beginning to change.

As a franchisor, it is not so easy for Choice to mandate changes in building design or operations. However, it can make programs and design options available to interested licensees. By the end of the summer, brand prototype specifications for all of Choice's new construction brands-Comfort Inn, Comfort Suites, Sleep Inn, Cambria Suites, MainStay Suites and Suburban-will have been modified to support LEED certification. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the U.S. Green Building Council's third-party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.

'It is easier to implement these changes with a new brand,' says Shaun Smithson, senior director product development and design for Choice. 'About 99.9 percent of Choice properties are owned by licensees. We can't make as big of a leap [as other companies] because we don't own the assets.'

Don Griner, senior director design and construction for Cambria Suites, says Choice's new construction brands have performed or will perform a LEED gap analysis to determine what design changes are necessary to prepare them for LEED. He emphasized that the design changes made for LEED will be optional ones for licensees. For those licensees interested in pursuing LEED, Choice will help them determine the economics of their projects' designs.

### **Green Advantages to Cambria Design**

'You can't just add LEED standards across the board,' says Griner, who adds that Choice already has two Cambria Suites licensees interested in obtaining LEED certification for their new hotels. Cambria Suites is one Choice brand that lends itself easier to LEED. Its flat roofs make it easier to add green roof or solar installations.

Choice has been working with LEED accredited consultants to green up its hotel building designs. The company has two professionally licensed in-house architects, neither of whom is LEED accredited. Four Choice employees will receive their LEED accreditation soon, Griner says.

From an operations standpoint, Choice is also working to help its licensees reduce costs related to energy and water consumption, as well as waste.

'Our mission is to reduce energy consumption, promote water conservation, reduce waste and increase our recycling effort,' says Janna Morrison, senior vice president, community and franchise engagement for Choice. 'A comprehensive review of best practices is underway for both our corporate offices and hotels. Our new construction hotel prototypical designs and specifications feature Energy Star-rated equipment. We have also created a guide to energy efficiency and efforts are underway for education and training on environmental issues, tips on how to conserve energy and reduce our carbon footprint in addition to volunteer activities that help protect the environment.'

### **Operations Plan for 2009**

Phil Beilke, senior director brand management for Cambria Suites, says Choice will be testing an operations program for Cambria in the fourth quarter of this year that it intends to roll out in 2009. Some of the elements of the program may include recyclable linens and a towel and linen reuse program. Beilke emphasized, however, that licensees will be required to implement other energy-saving programs before launching towel and linen reuse ones.

As Choice prepares to formalize its green initiatives, some of its licensees have been aggressively pursuing a reduction in environmental impact for quite some time. The Saunders Hotel Group's Comfort Inn & Suites Boston/Airport, for example, is an Energy Star Certified property. The Comfort Inn & Suites Red Deer in Alberta, Canada, has a roof-based solar heating system.

Choice's green initiatives were first announced at its convention in May. They will be further explained to licensees at the company's fall regional meetings. It may be a while before any green initiative is rolled out to the public. Griner says Choice first wants to have a tangible consumer benefit that it can market.

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](http://www.greenlodgingnews.com). Glenn Hasek can be reached at [editor@greenlodgingnews.com](mailto:editor@greenlodgingnews.com).

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