



LUXURY meets sustainability

Four Seasons Austin seeks 90% landfill diversion rate

BY MELISSA MCGUIRE

Austin, Texas, has a reputation for being one of the most environmentally conscious cities in the U.S. The Four Seasons hotel chain has undertaken a variety of sustainable initiatives at its many properties. Thus, it is only natural that Four Seasons Austin has embarked on arguably the chain's most ambitious initiative yet.

Launched this past December after two years in development, the program is called Zero Waste initiative. The goal is to minimize Four Seasons Austin's footprint using a combination of recycling, composting and trash diversion. Specifically, the program aims to increase the hotel's waste diversion rate from less than 10% to 90%, effectively limiting the property to 6 square feet of uncompacted trash daily.

Today that number is at 70%. In the three months the program has been in effect, Four Seasons Austin has diverted

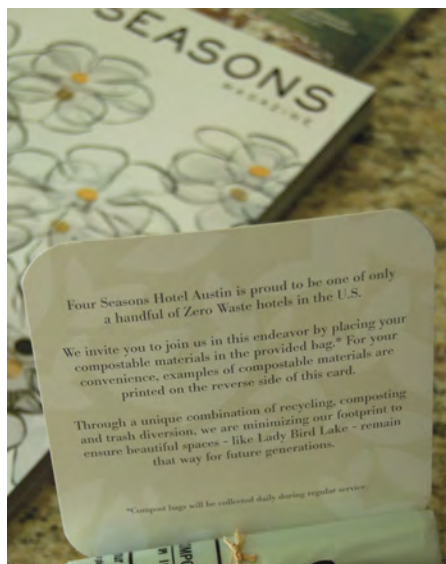
216,000 pounds, which comes to around 100 tons. To put it in perspective, Whole Foods, a company noted for putting a premium on sustainability, also has a 70% diversion rate.

Four Seasons Austin is partnering in this initiative with Texas Disposal Systems

(TDS), the only facility in the U.S. to handle all three components of waste: recycling, composting and landfill. The company has the capability to collect and process all the materials using a single stream.

While the Four Seasons chain has embarked on sustainability initiatives for quite some time, zero waste is particularly significant, if only because of what's going on in the city in which it is located. By 2040, Austin projects to have zero waste and has already embarked upon numerous initiatives and incentives to achieve this. For example, as of March 1, 2013, plastic bags are banned in the city's grocery stores and markets due to the green insensitivity. "We have a lot of environmentally passionate people, and it helps us with our own initiatives," said Rob Hagelberg, the hotel's general manager.

Aside from a citywide initiative, Four





OPPOSITE PAGE: Above, Four Seasons Austin lobby. Below, a card explaining the Zero Waste program and compost bag can be found in every Four Seasons room.

LEFT: Above, Four Seasons Austin employees visit recycling partner, Texas Disposal Systems. Below, compost-enriched soil from the hotel's repurposed waste is utilized in the landscaping around the hotel.



Seasons Austin found sustainability was a topic near and dear to its guests. “Our guests started asking what we were doing on a sustainability level, and we knew it needed to become a lot more than just recycling paper and plastics,” said Kerri Holden, senior director of public relations-Americas, Four Seasons Hotel Austin.

SPECIFICS

Holden said the Zero Waste program could not be possible without making some changes to the guest rooms. “Visually, we have to contain our trash (what goes to a landfill) to only 6 square feet, the equivalent of 10%. For an entire hotel with 291 rooms, that is quite difficult. But we decided that is all we are going to take to the landfill, so if we can’t repurpose the rest of the waste, trash would be spilling everywhere. We had no choice but to make this happen.”

In keeping with the initiative, Four Seasons Austin brought in dual collection receptacles for guest rooms – a green bin for recycling and a regular trash container. “If the bins aren’t used correctly, our staff has been trained to decipher what is recyclable and what isn’t,” Holden said. “We’ve also added a compost bag in every room that is collected daily.” Included is a card explaining the initiative to guests and how they can participate.

Because many of the guests have been asking the hotel to step up its sustainability initiatives, Hagelberg believes a large number will welcome the chance to participate. “And if guests choose not to, that’s fine, too, but we’re making it so incredibly easy for them. We’re confi-

dent many will at least make an effort.”

Each floor has the capability to collect recycling, trash or composting materials. “We found it’s much easier to sort it immediately rather than taking everything to one location and trying to sort it there,” Holden said.

The program extends to the kitchen, where the hotel composts all food that is served to the guests whether it is in the restaurants or via room service. “For instance, if we’ve had an excess of prepared food that didn’t go to the guests, instead of throwing it out we will put it in our employee cafeteria,” Holden said. “Many times our chefs will create additional dishes using prepared foods that weren’t consumed. It goes beyond composting. Our food is reused on multiple levels. We’re also looking into a way to donate extra food so it doesn’t even have to go into the compost process.”

But Zero Waste does not end there. Once TDS has the opportunity to repurpose the waste, it comes back to Four Seasons Austin about a month and a half later to be used as mulch. “We’re looking into putting in a garden that we can use in our food preparation,” Holden said. “If we can use the compost from our facilities, the process will come full circle.” By utilizing compost-enriched soil made by TDS from

the hotel’s own compost supply – to fertilize the restaurant chef’s garden and the lawns and greenbelts surrounding the hotel – the program is becoming closed loop.

“We are proud to bring closed-loop recycling solutions to businesses in Austin that have similar goals as TDS: to divert as much as possible from the landfill,” said Jennifer Gregory, marketing director, TDS.

Green procedures at Four Season Austin

1. Putting entire floors out of service during lower occupancy periods, eliminating lights and electricity in greater numbers.
2. Donating discarded soaps and toiletry bottles to a local women’s non-profit.
3. Donating linens and repurposing towels and robes.
4. Utilizing water-saving shower heads and low-flow toilets.
5. Sourcing 60% of its ingredients from local farmers and ranches for use in food preparation.
6. Recycling food grease.
7. Using salt water in outdoor pool requiring fewer chemicals during maintenance.
8. Utilizing xeriscaping and native foliage in the landscaping.
9. Recycling items hotel-wide including paper, glass, linens, batteries, computers, soaps and toiletries.
10. Retrofitting public and service areas with energy-efficient lighting.