

## **Getting Green in the Meeting Industry**

By Elisa Lanza Jaworski

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Something is new in our industry: Green Meetings!!

What is a Green Meeting? As defined by the Convention Industry Council, it is “a meeting or event that incorporates environmental considerations to minimize its negative impact on the environment.”

If prevailing scientific hypotheses are correct, the world has as little as 10 years to dramatically reduce its carbon output in order to mitigate future weather-based disasters.

The time has come for each of us to begin thinking “green” by learning about and promoting eco-friendly meetings. In fact, Convene Magazine characterized the need for an environmentally-conscious approach to meetings as “imperative.”

While the challenge may seem daunting when thinking about the changes we need to implement in our meetings to reduce their carbon footprint, there are actually some very simple steps that can be taken that will make quite an impact toward that goal.

Rebecca Mebane, director of conferences and meetings for the National Recycling Coalition, spoke to our chapter in June of 2005 on this topic. She suggested starting out with just a couple of changes when incorporating green practices into your meeting.

For example, cut down on printed material by offering fewer speaker handouts. Then post them on the website instead. Or, refrain from using paper products for food and beverage service. Offer re-usable water bottles to use with water coolers that are available throughout facility. In many cases you will not only be saving the environment but certainly money and time as well.

One way to ensure that you are meeting in an eco-friendly venue is to communicate that need in the initial planning phase and incorporate such into the RFP process. Now that some of the major hotel chains, notably Starwood, Marriott and Fairmont, are committed to environmentally friendly policies, creating green meetings has become much more of a cooperative effort with a rising sensitivity to such requirements.

To that same end, convention centers and caterers around the world have already begun to implement programs to improve recycling efforts, curtail power and cut HVAC usage. Some have installed water saving devices in restrooms and many are using water dispensers throughout their facilities instead of bottled water to reduce the use of plastic bottles.

If you are looking for a template for going green, go to the CIC web site, [www.conventionindustry.org](http://www.conventionindustry.org) and download the Green Meeting Report that was produced by the CIC in 2004.

In addition, here is a list of things to keep in mind as you begin to implement your environmentally responsible meeting practices.

- Make sure the facility in which you are meeting has recycling bins and encourage your attendees to use them.
- Use cloth napkins and tablecloths instead of paper. If this is not feasible, request compostable napkins or napkins made from recycled content material.
- Use mugs instead of disposable coffee cups.
- Use china instead of Styrofoam.
- If non-disposable service ware is unavailable, use biodegradable disposable service ware in conjunction with a compost program or service ware made from recycled content materials.
- Eliminate the use of plastic stir sticks with any beverage service. Reusable spoons should be used for coffee service.
- Eliminate box lunches.
- All condiments should be served in serving containers, not in individual packets.
- Where possible, donate surplus food to local shelters or soup kitchens.

*Elisa Lanza Jaworski is Northeastern Sales Director for the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor and Convention Bureau.*