

Building a Sustainable SRI in the Rockies Conference

SRI in the Rockies' commitment to building a sustainable conference begins with the site selection process. We are committed to being as carbon neutral and sustainable as possible. While there are no perfect properties, we require prospective venues to address a variety of issues of sustainability in their site selection proposals. Once a property is selected, our commitment continues through the planning process to our onsite presence. Our concern for the planet and the principles of environmental sustainability inform our conference venue, attendees, and exhibitors. Building awareness is a part of our larger plan.

SITE SELECTION

The conference RFP requires properties to complete the Green Hotels Initiative (GHI) survey (<http://www.ceres.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=761&srcid=563>) and to submit it with their proposal. Prospective sites are queried about being LEED certified (<http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CategoryID=19>), a certification by the U.S. Green Building Council, and meeting other green design standards. Each property is asked to disclose any other evaluations they may have received regarding their carbon footprint. In addition, site management is required to disclose any material environmental impacts or problems that may exist.

Information regarding the use of locally grown and/or organic food in event menus is requested, as well as any policies regarding the disposition of unused, but paid for, food. The donation of such food to a local homeless shelter or other facility, subject to local health regulations, is a priority. Composting of food that does not meet these regulations is favorably noted.

Prospective venues are rated on these issues, as well as those involving the distance from a major airport, size of meeting room space, appropriate lodging rooms, sufficient recreational opportunities, general ambience, etc.

As mentioned earlier, although most of the major hotel chains are working toward increased energy efficiency and decreased water usage, there are no perfect properties. We are heartened, however, that significant strides have been made by the hotel industry in the nineteen years since SRI in the Rockies began.

ONSITE

Recycling. Recycling bins are conveniently located in the Exhibit Hall and in hallways. Recycling capability can vary significantly among municipalities where the conference is held. Our Recycling Sponsorship has been a useful tool in creating awareness among hotel staff.

Lodging Rooms. We work with hotel staff to ensure that televisions and lights are turned off when participants enter their rooms upon check-in. Housekeeping is instructed to leave used towels and linens in place unless participants specifically request clean ones. Fortunately, this is becoming standard practice at most of our venues.

Newspaper Distribution. Unless door service is specifically requested, newspapers are made available at an easily accessible central location for pickup. This saves a lot of unread and unwanted newspapers from being recycled or ending up in the landfill.

Water Usage. Rather than individual glasses of water and other beverages being made available at mealtimes, or in meeting rooms, pitchers of water are placed throughout the conference venue with

empty glasses for individual use. We do not use bottled water. This approach saves water and reduces the overall use of plastic bottles by conference participants.

The Fairmont Chateau Whistler 4 Green Key Rating

The venue for the 19th annual SRI in the Rockies Conference will be The Fairmont Chateau Whistler, October 26–29, 2008. The Hotel Association of Canada has awarded The Fairmont Chateau Whistler a 4 Green Key Rating in the Green Key Eco-Rating Program (http://www.hotelassociation.ca/site/programs/green_key.htm). Some of the reasons behind this superior rating include:

- The Fairmont Chateau Whistler Golf Club is Audubon Certified, which means it adheres to environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, chemical reduction, water conservation, etc.
- Support of local farms such as North Arm Farms in Pemberton (located 20 minutes north of Whistler).
- An onsite herb garden, with over 25 herbs providing a plentiful supply to Fairmont chefs.
- Ocean Wise certification—a Vancouver Aquarium conservation program created to help restaurants and their customers make environmentally friendly seafood choices (www.oceanwisecanada.com).
- Commitment to purchasing products from like-minded suppliers such as organic wine producers, Illy Coffee, and the Metropolitan Tea Company Ltd, North America's first member of the Ethical Tea Sourcing Partnership.
- A fully functional recycling system which includes all plastics, glass, aluminum, tin, paper, and cardboard, and diverts over 90% of the hotel's organic waste from the landfill. Recycling bins can be found in all guest rooms and are available in all meeting rooms.
- Retrofitted guest rooms with brighter bulbs that use 75% less energy thus reducing demand for fossil fuels and large scale hydro.
- Low flow showerheads and toilets in all guestrooms and a system that recirculates water through the hotel as part of the property's cooling system.
- A program to encourage all guests to participate in a Sheet and Towel Exchange Program by not having their linens replaced on a daily basis.
- An energy efficient laundry machine service helps to save 60,000 gallons of water annually.
- Housekeepers who make sure that lights, radios, and televisions are turned off in unoccupied rooms.
- A program to donate barely used bars of soaps, shampoo, and other amenities to various charities.
- Collection of all disposable batteries for proper disposal or recycling.
- The purchase of Eco-Logo certified wind power for 249 check-in computers reducing greenhouse gas emissions by almost 100 tons per year.

CARBON OFFSETS

SRI in the Rockies began purchasing carbon offsets in 2003. In 2005, we began our relationship with *NativeEnergy* (www.NativeEnergy.com). *NativeEnergy* is partly owned by the non-profit Intertribal Council on Utility Policy (COUP), an organization of Native American tribes. It is one of three U.S. companies to be rated as "top performing" in the first independent review of retail carbon offset providers. Thirty companies worldwide were considered in the study.

A portion of each conference registration fee buys carbon credits to offset energy consumed in the meeting and lodging rooms during the conference. Purchase of these credits supports alternative energy projects on Native American lands.