

VOLUME TRIPLES IN THREE MONTHS

# COMPOSTING TAKES ROOT AT BOSTON HYATT REGENCY



*With strong leadership and commitment, hotel cuts disposal costs in half, trains staff in separation methods and becomes model for other programs.*

*Jennifer Weeks*

**V**IEWED from outside, the Hyatt Regency in Boston's financial district looks like a standard downtown hotel, with 22 stories, 500 rooms, and a doorman. But inside, the Hyatt ([www.hyattregencyboston.com](http://www.hyattregencyboston.com))

is pursuing a broad set of "greening" initiatives, including a pilot program to separate food residuals for composting. A brochure summarizing the hotel's environmental commitments states, "We take care of our guests. We take care of our world."

The Hyatt Regency is one of only a handful of hotels in the Boston area that are conducting organics separation on a large scale. Its greening program was initiated in 2003 when the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), a local nonprofit, approached the hotel about hosting CERES' annual conference. Not surprisingly, as an organization that advocates shareholder action to promote corporate social and environmental responsibility, CERES wanted more than rooms and meeting space for its money. The organization presented Hyatt management with a list of environmental measures that were required to win its business.

As it happened, the Hyatt (which had just been acquired by the chain from Swissotel) already had several such measures in place,

including bulk toiletry dispensers in guest rooms and an HVAC system that turned climate controls on when guests checked in and off at checkout. CERES asked for other steps, including a recycling program, a sheet and towel reuse option for guests, and separation of organics for composting. After a series of meetings, the Hyatt agreed to pursue these and other sustainability measures, and won the contract to host the 2004 CERES conference.

CERES found a receptive audience in General Manager David Nadelman, who had some experience with sustainable hotel practices from previous assignments in Colorado and New Mexico but was interested in learning more about possible steps to demonstrate environmental responsibility at the Hyatt Regency Boston. "It was truly a partnership, but we weren't doing it just for their conference," says Nadelman. "It's about the community, the city and the state that we live in. We wanted to make sure that we could carry these programs forward, so we implemented systems to do that."

Nadelman and Senior Executive Chef Brad Ozerdem were intrigued by the idea of organics separation, although they initially were daunted by the task. As a first step, they agreed with CERES to separate organic residuals generated during food preparation. However, no hauling service was willing to transport the Hyatt's organic residuals to composting sites. Many haulers who service eastern Massachusetts

pick up food residuals in compactors and roll-offs from high-volume gener-



**Executive Chef Brad Ozerdem (left) and General Manager David Nadelman (right) became convinced that composting was a good idea after measuring the quantities of organic residuals generated by food preparation in the hotel.**



Organics hauling costs the Hyatt \$70/ton, compared to \$90/ton for regular waste.

ators, but at that point, the hotel projected that its loads would be relatively small.

#### **NARROW STREETS AND HEAVY TRAFFIC**

Location was also a twofold disincentive. The Hyatt is situated in the center of downtown Boston in a densely-developed zone with narrow, winding streets and heavy weekday traffic. In addition, nearly all of the licensed food residuals composters in eastern Massachusetts are at least 25 miles from downtown Boston. Geography is a disadvantage for waste processors as well as for waste generators. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, some 30 composting operations across Massachusetts with a combined permitted capacity of almost 150,000 tons/year accept food residuals. However, because many are not close to major waste sources, some are underutilized.

As a compromise, the Hyatt agreed to weigh all of the food prep waste that it would have recycled if disposal service were available, so that CERES and Hyatt management would have some data on the hotel's waste stream as a basis for further discussions. "We brought a meat scale upstairs and parked it outside the kitchen to weigh trash barrels before we took them down to the dumpsters," says Ozerdem. "We gave them a tally of organics, bottles, cans, and cardboard that came out of the kitchen, as an indicator of whether there was enough waste to create a demand down



**Environmental measures at the Hyatt include (clockwise) energy-saving lights, sheet and towel reuse option, climate control activated by guest check-in and check-out, and recycling.**

the road. That was our introduction to organics separation."

Throughout 2004, the Hyatt continued to develop other green initiatives such as its recycling program, but was unable to find a hauler for the organics. Nadelman and Ozerdem were sufficiently impressed by the quantities of organic residuals from food preparation that hotel staff had documented to spend time researching potential hauling services online and discussing the issue with local environmental groups, consultants, and state regulators. "Organics recycling was the missing piece, and we were intrigued by it," says Nadelman.

Finally, Sumner Martinson, coordinator of the Massachusetts Department

of Environmental Protection's composting program, connected the Hyatt with Herb's Disposal, a business that already was servicing several Boston-area hotels. Herb's was a suitable candidate to work with the Hyatt because it used smaller containers and made more frequent pick ups than other food haulers. "We're trying to fill in the void," says company owner Valerie Savage. "We cut the cost, we clean up the area, and we pick up daily." She acknowledges that hauling organic residuals is not a profit-making venture for Herb's at this point, but hopes that other customers in the Boston metro area will follow the Hyatt's lead. "We're trying to establish the route, and then it will become profitable."

#### **COLLECTION VOLUME GROWS**

Herb's Disposal started collecting food waste from the Hyatt in late January 2005. In the first month, the hotel generated three tons of organics, but this figure rose to nine tons by April. Hotel employees have begun to sort table scraps as well as prep waste, and Ozerdem also plans to institute organics separation in the Hyatt's banquet kitchen, which will generate significant additional food residuals during its busy seasons in the spring and fall. The Hyatt has worked to make the relationship work for Herb's. Trucks make pick ups overnight to avoid downtown traffic, and the hotel uses a refrigerator that was already installed on its loading dock to store the food residuals so that Herb's can make three visits weekly instead of daily pick ups. Hotel stewards have been trained to remove food residuals from plastic bags instead of stacking the bags in disposal canisters (which would leave too much plastic in the load). "From day one, they have been



**The hotel uses a refrigerator already installed on its loading dock to store food residuals so the hauler can make three weekly pick-ups versus daily collection.**

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cost-effective to work with,” says Savage. “Brad took the bull by the horns and has done a super job of training the staff. When we’re all on the same wave length, it works for everyone.”

Nadelman and Ozerdem strongly support the organics separation program, which is generating savings for the hotel. Organics hauling costs the Hyatt \$70/ton, compared to \$90/ton for regular waste. In addition, the hotel formerly paid its waste hauler a fixed charge of \$130 per “pull,” but Herb’s is now taking so much organic residuals that the Hyatt has shifted its garbage collection from a fixed schedule to less frequent, as needed visits. By paying fewer fixed charges for garbage collection, the Hyatt saves roughly \$400 to \$500 monthly.

The Hyatt Regency Boston pursued organics separation on its own initiative, not as part of a broader corporate policy. However, the company knows about the venture, which Nadelman plans to share as a best practice within Hyatt when the program has more of a track record. “They like to see entrepreneurial spirit, and we’re empowered to do what makes sense for our business,” he says. Nadelman expects that Hyatt’s other two hotels in the greater Boston area could eventually implement similar programs using Herb’s Disposal for hauling. Other Hyatt hotels may not have similar resources available, but they will have the Hyatt Regency Boston’s input to

steer them if they choose to pursue organics separation. “There needs to be incentives for haulers. That’s the hard part,” says Ozerdem. He maintains that training staff to separate food residuals was not difficult. “They may not all speak English, but they’re very smart people. They all feel good about it and are proud that we’re doing it.”

In the meantime, the Hyatt Regency Boston has joined the Green Hotel Association and is researching the steps necessary to gain an Energy Star rating. CERES president Mindy Lubber, former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region One office, has high praise for the hotel’s commitment. “Moving a large hotel — particularly one that’s part of a chain — to do more than what’s required as standard operating procedure absolutely demands leadership and a true commitment on the part of the general manager, but Dave Nadelman rose to the occasion,” says Lubber. She acknowledges that hauling remains the weak link in the chain for organics recycling in the Boston area, but sees the Hyatt’s program as a promising step. “You need a few hotels to lead, and we hope to see more of them do what the Hyatt is doing. With more buy-in, the business opportunities for haulers will emerge.” ■

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