The Hotel of the Future
Technology is changing the hotel guest experience. Here are 20 ways tomorrow’s hotel will be different from today’s.

At the YOTEL New York, a towering robotic arm takes guests’ luggage and stores it in bar-coded storage bins. The Nine Zero Hotel in Boston uses iris-scan technology that opens the door to its presidential suite, while the Hotel Éclat in Taipei, Taiwan, has toilets with lids that open automatically. The hotel experience is changing, and the future will be here faster than you think. We asked planners, hoteliers and hospitality experts to make some predictions on what the guest experience will be like. What follows are 20 features that are already here, or will soon be here before you even know it.

THE BRAND EXPERIENCE

1. Personalization
Industry experts agree that the hotel of the future will be completely personalized. From the height of the desk chair and bathroom mirror and the firmness of the mattress to room temperature, all of these will be to each guest’s liking when they enter the guest room. Inspired by advancing technology and pioneers such as Amazon, the hospitality industry will mine and use data to create a customized experience similar to the one we already see in the e-commerce world.

“The cookie-cutter in-room experience has to die,” says internationally-recognized keynote-speaker Dr. Lalia Rach, associate dean, UW-Stout School of Hospitality Leadership, Menomonie, WI, and founder of Rach Enterprises. “We’ve talked about customization for a long time now,” she notes. “We’ve talked about the colors of the room changing, about what’s on the walls changing to be more reflective of the person who is in the room. But it’s not just the physical, it’s the intangible.”

2. Customized Service
In tandem with the move toward personalization will come a trend toward customized service. “When I land in New York, why can’t I receive a text saying, ‘Looking forward to seeing you at our hotel today. Do you need anything?’” posits Rach. “It’s getting to the point that if I grant you permission to know where I am location-wise, you should know what matters to me.”

Pillow menus were once all the rage. From a down-filled pillow to a sound pillow with built-in speakers, this was considered a high-end amenity. Rach is not impressed. “Don’t offer me a smorgasbord of choices. Make sure the pillow I like is in my room. If Amazon can do it, why can’t the hotel industry?”

3. Female Friendly
Julia Sutton, COO of Exhale Enterprises, which runs 22 spas in the US and the Caribbean, says many female executives do not feel that the hotel industry has embraced them. This will no longer be the case in the hotel of the future. Some hotel companies, Kimpton and Hyatt included, have already launched female-friendly programs that cater specifically toward women travelers.

4. Experience-Oriented
Hotels of the future will seek new ways to create experiences. Already, lobbies increasingly are being transformed into multi-use spaces where groups can eat, drink, work, socialize and take in museum-quality artwork. Activity options such as the on-site art room in the Gastwerk, a hotel in Hamburg, Germany, that was a former gas plant, will be commonplace. The popular attraction features an artist in residence; hotel guests can pop into his studio and watch him create his works, which are featured throughout the hotel.

The Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, scheduled to open May 1, will be home to one of the US’ most impressive sculptures in a hotel—Birth of the American Flag—by renowned artist Rodney Carroll. The 56-foot sculpture, the centerpiece of the new property, is viewable from the ground-floor lobby, mezzanine and the interior-facing guest rooms. It will be the largest piece of art in any Marriott hotel.

5. Grab and Go
More casual dining establishments are becoming popular, where guests can get a quick bite at a reasonable price and enjoy communal seating with Wi-Fi and plenty of plugs.

Herb N’ Kitchen is a new dining concept created by Hilton that is now available in the New York Hilton Midtown, the largest hotel in Manhattan. Herb N’ Kitchen infuses fresh, local gourmet food into an upscale, casual restaurant and convenient culinary market. It also invites guests into the dining experience by enabling them to see their meals prepared.

6. Hotel Brands Will Redefine Themselves into Boutique-Like Niches
This is already happening, but in the future, more hotel brands will offer meeting groups and other travelers an array of chain options based on demographics. “Brands are being challenged because many travelers do not prefer standardization as much as in the past. Edition is an example of a new approach to hotel branding,” explains Bjorn Hanson, Ph.D., Tisch Center for Hospitality at NYU.

Edition is a Marriott boutique hotel that will anchor a 100-city chain, in an effort to attract a younger crowd. The brand was conceived with the help of boutique hotelier Ian Schrager. Marriott International has launched another hotel brand, Moxy, also aimed at the Millennial traveler.

Indeed, the lucrative Millennial segment is having a big effect on what the hotel of the future will look like. “With this generation, travel is no longer discretionary, it’s a right—and that’s a different reality,” notes Rach.
Starwood Hotels & Resorts has its Aloft brand, with more than 75 hotels in 14 countries. “For the always-on next generation of traveler, Aloft offers a tech-forward, vibrant experience and a modern style that is different by design,” says Brian McGuinness, Sr. VP, Starwood. “We are aware of the power of Gen Y specifically, who are poised to become the largest consumer group in the history of the US and, therefore, the future market for most consumer brands. Gen Y is made up of more than 75 million individuals, and they spend $200 billion each year on consumer products and experiences. Loft-like guest rooms, a buzzing W XYZ bar scene in the open lobby, an urban-inspired grab-and-go café and industrial design elements throughout make Aloft a far cry from the conventional cookie-cutter brands.”

7. Name-Brand Fitness Centers and Spas
Another trend that will continue is hotels and resorts featuring name-brand fitness centers and spas as a way to differentiate themselves and bump up offerings while-offsetting the bulk of investments on a partner.

Properties are pairing up with fitness brands such as Exhale, Core Performance, David Barton Gym and SoulCycle. “Hotels are now trying to create a lifestyle for their guests,” says Sutton. “They can no longer get away with just putting a gym in or a regular spa.”

8. Celebrity-Chef Restaurants
Hotels and resorts have already been adding celebrity-chef restaurants at an unprecedented rate. The days of a hotel restaurant thinking it can rely on a captive audience are long over. “They are being judged just like restaurants in the retail space.”

9. Front Desk-Less
The hotel of the future will be without a front desk. “In the past, there were wood and marble front desks that served as a barrier. It was as if the staff was afraid of the customer,” says Rach. Those days are over. We are no longer a society that takes to lines. We are definitely not a society of patience. Even the airline industry gets that. There are kiosks and that takes to lines. We are definitely not a society of patience.

The hotel industry has to move away from the structure that currently exists and move into an experience structure with service.”

Right now, 14 Aloft properties are equipped with Smart Check-in, giving travelers the ability to bypass the traditional check-in process and head straight to their guest room with an enhanced keycard equipped with radio frequency identification (RFID) technology. An additional 14 will have this capability this year.

10. Keyless Entry
A guest will walk into the lobby and head straight to his room. The room number will be sent via text, as will a barcode that unlocks the door. One’s cell phone can be used for easy, keyless entry, something Starwood also is pioneering. Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG) members who opt in to this offer receive an enhanced SPG/Aloft-branded keycard. On the day of a planned stay, a text message is sent to the guest’s mobile device with his room number. Once at the hotel, guests can skip the check-in line and go straight to their assigned room, where their enhanced keycard will unlock the door.

11. Easy-to-Access Technology
The movement toward augmented reality—the use of computer imagery overlaid on the field of view to augment the reality that has recently been introduced with Google Glasses—will eventually make its way into guestroom design. This will enable the attendees to access a variety of information about the hotel, the designation and the meeting or event through interactive technology displays.

Andrew MacCachran, American Chemistry Council, says that in-room technology access is a priority. “We are a society with the philosophy, ‘I know how I want things and I expect them to be that way,’” says MacCachran, who engages in the end-to-end meeting planning for 30 annual off-site conferences and events ranging from 30 to 900 attendees. “We are a generation that expects everything to be customized and efficient and the technology we now have at our disposal. We want multiple outlets that are easily accessible, wireless, iPod docking stations and flat-screen TVs. These things are not negotiable.”

12. Intelligent Furniture
According to “Hotels 2020: Beyond Segmentation,” a study conducted by Fast Future Research and technology company Amadeus, the hotel of the future will feature intelligent furniture with built-in memory that will adapt to changes in body posture. Guests will also have the opportunity to choose the room’s artwork and display their own photos in digital frames. As technology advances, and intelligent wallpapers emerge, guests will be able to configure the room décor on arrival or download their preferred designs beforehand.

13. The Ultimate Blow Dry
Don’t expect a stack of fluffy, white towels to be waiting in the bathroom in the hotel of the future. Head-to-toe body dryers will take their place, say hotel industry insiders. This is great news for the environment, as millions and millions of gallons of water are used every day to wash hotel towels, not to mention the electricity, soap, and labor that also are required.

14. Amenities
Of course there still will be a high-powered hair dryer in the bathroom for styling purposes, and an iron in the closet. But there also will be dermatologist-approved skin-care products, and humidifiers will be waiting in the appropriate rooms. Embedded in bathroom mirrors will be touch-screens and TVs.

Marriott Hotel’s 10,000-sq.-ft. Innovation Lab focuses on hotel design concepts for the future

15. The Virtual Concierge
Once in the room, there should be a message on an iPad, TV or on the touch-sensitive tablet walls that display text and graphics to welcome guests and ask if they want reservations in a restaurant that they may have visited in the past, says Rach. This is the guest’s personal control center, where he or she can order food, get a wake-up call, check on local events and attractions and book spa appointments and golf tee times. Lighting, temperature and music are adjustable from here as well. “The guest will be able to utilize 24-hour concierge-level service at the touch of a button,” enthuses Rach.

16. Smaller Guest Rooms
Guest rooms in the hotel of the future will be smaller than
those in the past. “Credenzas have been removed that contained CRT TVs, now that flat screens are the norm,” reports Hanson. “Another factor affecting room size is that Millennials and other travelers are spending less time in their guest rooms. Many prefer to congregate with their computers in public areas.”

17. Interactive TVs
Dan Nadeau, GM, Marriott Marquis, DC, notes that “Interactive TVs are falling into must-have category. They must enable guests to sync up their mobile devices with the TV to actually play their own content on the in-room flat screens. Basically, guests are expecting the tech they have at home, including access to their own content library while on the road.”

18. Customized Meeting Space
The next generation of meeting space is a focus of Marriott International. The ability to customize and personalize ballrooms and meeting rooms is key.

“Next-generation spaces foster collaboration with technology integrated into an environment that fosters productive work. Soft seating, spaces to write on the walls, ballrooms that are blank canvases and can be easily customized, and more social networking spaces in the meeting areas are what we are driving toward,” says Jenny Hsieh, VP at Marriott International. An example can be found in the Shanghai Marriott Hotel City Centre, which has one of the largest LCD screens in China and can be customized for each gathering.

19. Meetings With a Purpose
An emphasis will be placed on much more than just physical meeting space. Marriott's newly launched “Meetings Imagined” is forward thinking as it is designed to appeal to the next generation of meeting professionals by leveraging an online platform—MeetingsImagined.com—to make gatherings more “visual, social and purposeful.”

According to Marriott, every meeting has one of seven objectives: celebrate, decide, educate, ideate, network, produce and promote. Meetings Imagined plans meetings around experiences that advance those purposes, rather than meetings that fulfill the purely logistical requirements of an RFP.

20. Meeting Attendee Kiosks
Pamela McQueary who plans meetings for a large retail chain, envisions the hotel of the future will offer dedicated kiosks where meeting attendees can check-in, as well as mobile apps that can easily be personalized for each meeting group.

As customization of the guest experience, meetings included, becomes increasingly important for hotels, McQueary expects such personalized conveniences to become de rigueur.

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH
Marriott is doing what it can to make sure it is ahead of the curve. It has a 10,000 sq.ft. Innovation Lab as well as an Innovation Team where employees and hotel owners brainstorm about what the hotel of the future will entail.

Three years ago, our group was formally developed out of this emerging need the company saw in a hotel industry that was becoming a sea of sameness," explains Jenny Hsieh, VP, insight, strategy and innovation at Marriott International. “We knew we had to create new and innovative ways to differentiate our brand.”

The Innovation Lab, located beneath the company’s headquarters in Bethesda, MD, also known as “The Underground,” offers rapid prototyping with instant feedback capabilities, bird’s-eye views from Internet-enabled cameras, and multiple avenues for customer participation.

“Everything we do is with the lens of what Millennials like,” says Hsieh. Marriott has tapped into its own workforce by inviting its Millennial employees to be part of an advisory board to help ascertain what resonates with this generation and what does not.

Not to be outdone, Starwood also has its own high-tech design lab at its headquarters in CT.

“The days of the hotel industry offering a product and saying to the consumer, ‘You better like it,’ are over,” says Dr. Lalia Rach. “I’m not suggesting hotels never did research on their consumers [before], but it was done in the vein that the hotel was in charge, and not the consumer. Until the industry realizes the level of disruption that has occurred, it will [continue to] have problems.”


Hotel Patrons Demand Sustainable Luxury
Demand for luxury and green initiatives are driving bookings for the coming year

In 2014, hotels can expect an increase in demand for green initiatives and luxury travel. Eco-friendly hotels are expected to become the norm in the next year and an increasing percentage of travelers are seeking luxury vacations.

Research released last April by TripAdvisor suggests that the majority of consumers have come to expect eco-friendly practices from hotels—it’s not a niche market anymore. Two-thirds (62%) of travelers expect hotels to have some type of environmental program in place and 58% of travelers said that they would either not pay more or would expect to pay less for a hotel with eco-initiatives. The survey found that only 17% of travelers would be willing to pay more for eco-features.

In response to concern that going green might negatively impact hotel bookings, the Cornell Center For Hospitality Research surveyed 9,000 hotels, analyzing their sales and rates. Cornell’s study showed that sustainability efforts are, overall, revenue neutral for hotels.

“It was not possible to address the situation of any individual hotel, but we can conclude that going green is compatible with existing quality standards of hotel service and that advertising green status does not hurt revenues,” said Howard G. Chong, Cornell School of Hotel Administration.

Luxury tourism is also trending in 2014. The results from Small Luxury Hotels of the World’s October survey indicated that, when asked to select just one luxury item, the majority of participants chose a luxury vacation (42%) over luxury items such as a new car. In Travel Leaders Group’s recent survey, which included 536 US-based travel agency owners, managers and frontline travel agents who book luxury travel, 85% of respondents said that luxury hotel bookings are higher than or on par with last year’s figures.

While there has been concern among luxury hotels that green initiatives would undermine their luxury product, consumer demand for eco-friendly accommodations must be considered.
According to TripAdvisor’s survey, 84% of participants said that eco-friendly efforts do not make their experience less comfortable or less luxurious. There is sufficient evidence that these two developing trends would do well to work together in 2014.

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9 WAYS TO DETOX YOUR PROPERTY

Get started now! Reducing your contact with chemicals—even a little—can yield clear benefits. Depending on your sensitivities, you might experience fewer allergy and asthma symptoms, headaches and skin irritations. Long-term you may even lower your risk of infertility and cancer.

We know what you’re thinking: Where do I start? And how much work is this going to take? While some people would have you ripping up carpeting and chucking furniture, we talked to environmental health experts to find low-effort, high-impact ways to minimize your toxic load and boost your health, then ranked them from the super easy to the more ambitious. Try a couple of these, or more, to really clear the air.

Kick off your kicks - Leave shoes at the door to keep out 80% of the crud they track in, per ISSA/InterClean. That can include nasty stuff like road sealant, pesticides and lead dust.

Crack the windows - Indoor air can be five times as polluted as outdoor air, so open the windows whenever the weather—and your AC or heating budget—permit.

Dump the dryer sheets - Most coat clothing with chemicals like quaternary ammonium compounds—which have been linked to the development of asthma—and acetone, also found in nail polish remover. Plus, your towels will be more absorbent sans the chemical covering.

Detox your dry cleaning - Remove the bags and air out clothes in the garage or hall for a day or two to shed some of the solvent, called perchloroethylene, that sticks to the fibers. Inhaling it can trigger respiratory and eye irritation, headaches, dizziness and vision problems, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG). You also could go to a “green” cleaner—just make sure they use liquid carbon dioxide or the wet-cleaning method, since other eco-alternatives can be just as toxic, warns Sonya Lunder, EWG.

Veto VOCs - Trade your vinyl shower curtain for one made of cotton, nylon, polyester or EVA or PEVA plastic. (Not sure if it’s vinyl? Look for the number 3 printed on the recycling seal on the curtain or its packaging, or the letters PVC.) In a study, vinyl curtains were found to release 108 volatile organic compounds (VOCs), chemicals that become gaseous at room temperature, potentially triggering headaches, nausea, dizziness and irritated eyes and throat. They’re also found in most paint, so look for cans labeled as low- or zero-VOC.

Toss your pesticides - Contact with some formulations may lead to nerve, skin and eye damage, headaches and nausea. (They are designed to kill rats and pests!) So when you have a pest issue, ask yourself whether it’s a nuisance or a health concern. If you’ve got ants, plug holes in your walls and keep counters cleaner. “For agents that cause disease—such as rodents or fleas—call a professional,” says Douglas A. Swift, MD, associate clinical professor at Tulane University. If you must DIY, try to buy less toxic pesticide brands, such as EcoSmart, and note label warnings. They go from “caution” to “warning” to “danger,” in order of toxicity.

Know your plastics - Some plastic containers can leach out a chemical called bisphenol-A (BPA), which is known to tamper with our hormones. In 2012, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned BPA from infant bottles and sippy cups. Then, in 2013, a review of research in the journal Endocrine Disruptors found that it may be associated with obesity, cardiovascular disease and other conditions in adults. So avoid plastics marked with a 7, which may contain BPA, and never put BPA-containing plastics in the microwave or dishwasher; BPAs are more likely to leach out when heated. Buy fresh or frozen foods, and look for glass or cardboard packaging when possible (the lining of cans could contain BPA, too). Doing so is especially important when it comes to acidic and oily foods, which can allow more BPA to leach out. The good news: BPA passes out of the body quickly, so it doesn’t take long to reduce your exposure.

Make your own cleaner - For an all-purpose, nontoxic cleaner that gets counters sparkling, try this DIY formula: 50% 9% vinegar + 50% water in a spray bottle with a few drops of kitchen liquid soap. Spray on surface or stain and allow to work for a minute or two before blotting or wiping clean.

Dust differently - Instead of sprays (which add to your chemical load) or feathers (which just kick up more dust), use dry, unscented microfiber cloths, which attract dirty particles instead of scattering them.
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The Problem with Older Thermostats - Mercury

There are more than 1.8 million thermostats containing eight tons of mercury in Illinois homes and buildings, according to a study by the Natural Resources Defense Council and Clean Water Fund, which are calling for stronger state rules this year to speed up safe recycling of these thermostats.

“Illinois has an important opportunity to safeguard the public from a little-known hazard. Few realize that most round or square thermostats—installed before the digital age—contain mercury,” said David Lennett, attorney in NRDC’s health program. “Stronger standards are needed in Illinois to ensure that when contractors or homeowners remove these thermostats, the mercury is properly recycled, rather than tossed in the trash where it can pollute our air, land and water.”

Mercury, a powerful neurotoxin, can cause damage to the human brain, kidneys and nervous system, and is of particular concern for pregnant women and children due to its effects on childhood development. For most people, the main source of exposure to mercury is through fish consumption where it is concentrated through the food chain. Illinois has a statewide fish advisory for all predatory fish, intended to protect pregnant women and children under 15 years of age.

NRDC and the Clean Water Fund released the study that shows 1.86 million thermostats in use in Illinois contain mercury; this is about one-fourth of the total 7.7 million thermostats on walls in the state. Each mercury thermostat carries, on average, four grams of mercury in one or more switches within the thermostat. That means Illinois thermostats collectively contain more than eight tons of mercury.


California Pioneers New Limits on Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products

California’s new Safer Consumer Product Regulations, effective October 1, 2013, require manufacturers of certain products that contain one or more chemicals deemed hazardous by the CA Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to remove that chemical or analyze the feasibility of substituting a safer alternative.

This analysis must take into account impacts from the entire life cycle of the product—from the point of manufacture to disposal. After review, regulators may require a range of actions, from new labeling to an outright ban of ingredients found too toxic. A product of the state’s Green Chemistry Initiative, the law seeks to limit consumer exposure to hazardous chemicals—but may pose a challenge to manufacturers, who will be responsible for the cost of the analysis as well as compliance with the final action.

Chemical enemies of the state

Regulators are currently refining a list of chemicals of concern, which is expected to top 230 substances. Listed chemicals must be on exposure indicator lists for water quality, air quality or biomonitoring, as well as exhibit one of seven threats to human health: carcinogenicity, reproductive toxicity, mutagenicity, developmental toxicity, endocrine disruption, neurotoxicity or persistent, bioaccumulative toxicity.

Peter Hsiao, attorney at Morrison and Forester—a firm that has followed the development of the law and compiled a list of resources for manufacturers online—said likely candidates may include those with known alternatives and products that are marketed to vulnerable populations such as children.

Hazarding a guess as to possible contenders, Hsiao named PVC because of the dioxin that’s released when it’s incinerated. “That’s what this life-cycle analysis is intended to capture. A product will be evaluated based not just upon the exposure that takes place at your house, but also at the end of its useful life.”

Hsiao also predicted that formaldehyde may be targeted, though he mentioned that there are also risks with polyurethane, a typical alternative in many applications (such as manufactured wood products) that is made using isocyanates known to induce occupational asthma. “The point of the alternative analysis is to find alternatives that aren’t as bad or worse,” said Hsiao. Regulatory rulings on such substitutions will set the tone for how stringent the new law will be. Phthalate plasticizers and heavy metals—such as lead, mercury and chromium 6—were also on his short list.

Remove, or find a safer alternative

DTSC plans to systematically work through these chemicals of concern by applying the new regulations gradually to groups of products; the first “priority products” are to be released by April 1, 2014. If manufacturers of these products choose not to remove the chemical of concern (or choose not to...
forfeit their right to sell in California), they will be required to disclose all ingredients in their products in an alternative analysis report. This may be the biggest hurdle, according to Hsia. “Companies that may not know the chemical make-up of all their ingredients will have to research their suppliers and take an inventory of their supply chain.” Protecting proprietary information might also complicate disclosure because, although some ingredients may be redacted if they are considered trade secrets, DTSC is entitled to deny such claims.

The report must also weigh the environmental and health impacts of ingredients and evaluate the feasibility of using safer substitutes. Certain tools like EPA’s ChemView or its Safer Chemical Ingredients List may provide a starting point for conducting this analysis.

Though it has yet to be tested, regulatory uncertainty in the regulation has some worried that alternative analysis reports will be evaluated arbitrarily without consideration to costs. The American Chemistry Council (ACC) objected to the regulation’s selection and evaluation process saying, “DTSC’s approach [should] ensure that the totality of relevant and reliable information is considered when assessing potential hazards of identified chemicals.”

Innovative but untested

Because Californians represent one-eighth of American consumers and products sold there carry ingredients from around the world, this regulation has the potential to affect global supply chains.

Hsiao describes the rule as “innovative but untested.” He worries that small companies with shorter planning cycles and fewer resources will be at a disadvantage, but says, “It’s a challenge all manufacturers can meet with some forward planning and good information.”

GUEST INPUT - Refrigerators

E-mail from an unnamed hotel guest

Recently, I stayed in two hotels in which the fridges were set so cold (at maximum cooling) that they froze my lettuce. One hotel was a Radisson and the other a Days Inn, both in CA. Of course, I was dismayed about my lettuce. I wonder, though, if the maximum cooling setting is usual for hotels. If so, this could not only waste a lot of lettuce in tuna sandwiches, but also waste a lot of electricity. Fridges in the US are considered to use 4.2% of electricity produced—not insignificant.

How are your guestroom refrigerators managed?

How to Improve Conference Badges

At most meetings, a conference badge is like a sign: You see it, you read it, you move on. At others, however, a conference badge is more like a key: It opens doors—literally and figuratively—to a better, more engaging meeting experience. If meetings were a comic book, one kind of badge would be Clark Kent and the other Superman. If you’d rather have the “Superman” of conference badges, consider near field communication (NFC) technology.

According to Successful Meetings’ Senior Editor Leo Jakobson, NFC badges, or “smart badges,” are embedded with a very small computer chip that can store and send data via radio signals. Unlike radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology, NFC smart cards work only within an inch of a reader, which makes it perfectly suited for meetings and events. Already used in wave-and-pay credit cards and in many cities’ public transit fare cards, NFC chips can be used to gain admittance into the exhibition hall, give attendees free access to public transportation in the meeting’s host city, track attendance at education sessions or purchase food from concessionaires.

“The badges take only eight seconds each to print and encode at a registration booth, and the readers that [are supplied by vendors] are simply standard smartphones that already have NFC-reading capability,” Jakobson writes. “In fact, about 36% of smartphones on the market today already have such capability.”

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Stormwater Fees and the Impact on Hotels

Making any guest facility more sustainable is a good business choice. Many are attracted to eco-friendly guest facilities, so it is important to consider ways to keep ahead of the competition regarding eco-friendly practices. Hotels that adopt green practices typically increase revenue and decrease costs. Did you know that water, wastewater and stormwater fees are increasing faster than any other commodity?

Most local jurisdictions now charge stormwater fees, which...
used to be part of the tax bill, but, increasingly are being charged as part of your water and/or wastewater charge. The trend is to base the stormwater fee on the amount of impervious area that a facility has. This means that hotels and motels will be subject to significant fees because the roofs of the buildings and the parking lots are all impervious. Implementing fees based on impervious surface area is an effort to protect our waterways.

What do these stormwater fees fund? The construction, operation and maintenance of a municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) can involve significant expense, especially when regulatory requirements, flooding concerns, water quality issues and population growth are factored in. Many communities are now adopting stormwater service fees by means of a stormwater utility. A stormwater utility is a sustainable funding mechanism dedicated to recover the costs of stormwater infrastructure regulatory compliance, planning, maintenance, capital improvements and repair and replacement. Stormwater fees are charged to tax-paying and tax-exempt properties and are typically based on property area.

What are Combined Sewer Overflow Systems? Most cities and towns started building sewer collection systems over 100 years ago, and many of these systems have not received adequate upgrades, maintenance and repairs over time. In addition, cities use a wide variety of materials, designs and installation practices to construct sewer collection systems. Even well-operated systems may be subject to occasional blockages or structural, mechanical or electrical failures.

Sanitary sewer collection systems collect sewage and other wastewater and transport it to a facility for proper treatment and disposal. Sanitary sewer overflows occur when untreated sewage is discharged from the collection system due to pipe blockages, pipe breaks, infiltration and inflow from leaky pipes, equipment failures and insufficient system capacity. Combined sewer systems are designed to carry sanitary wastewater and storm water in the same pipe to a sewage treatment plant during “dry weather.” In periods of rainfall or snow melt, however, the wastewater volume in a combined sewer system can exceed the capacity of the sewer system or treatment plant. For this reason, combined sewer systems are designed to overflow occasionally and discharge excess wastewater directly to nearby streams, rivers, lakes or estuaries.

A legacy of 19th century municipal engineering, Combined Sewer Overflow occurs mostly in older cities where the sewage system was designed to collect both wastewater and storm runoff in the same pipes. Less than 4% of US municipalities, 772 out of more than 20,000, have such combined sewer systems. Newer cities are typically designed with separate sewage and stormwater systems.

“It was mid-evening in January 2010 when a light snow turned to fall over Manhattan at just the moment when people began to wash their dinner dishes, do laundry, take showers and flush toilets. Within minutes, thousands of gallons of stormwater was rushing off the city’s non-absorbent (impervious) sidewalks, parking lots and buildings and cascading into the sewer system. Sweeping along whatever was in its path—salty grit, candy wrappers, paint, antifreeze, leaves, abandoned toys, Styrofoam cups, drug paraphernalia—the storm water dropped into a matrix of 550 pipes running beneath the streets, where it mixed with untreated feces and industrial wastes and swooched south with gathering momentum. As the slurry of waste rose, its flow accelerated from a gentle 2.5’ per second to a raging 9.5’ per second, scouring sediment out of the pipes and straining the system. It moved from small waste pipes into progressively larger pipes, and into a main that was 17” in diameter, which channeled the water downtown to a large pumping station. There, giant pumps whirred and the sewage/storm-water mix was sent to the newest and biggest sewage treatment plant, the Newton Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. As the wastewater pouring into the plant reached 700 million gallons that night, concern grew that the heavy flow was becoming dangerous; at that velocity, the water can erode the sewer pipe. They ordered the throttling of eight giant gates which diverted the wastewater into outfalls around the city: raw sewage now began to spew into New York Bay.”

Wastewater from sinks, tubs and toilets flow from smaller pipes to larger sewer mains, typically 3-5’ in diameter. There it combines with runoff from rainstorms as well as all the debris and chemicals that wash off the street or are poured in storm drains.

In dry weather wastewater is transported to a treatment plant, where it is treated before being discharged to a water body. Combined sewage flows to the plants mostly by gravity, but is assisted in spots by pumps. During periods of heavy rainfall, the combined sewage and stormwater volume can quickly exceed a sewage treatment plant's capacity. In order to keep sewage from backing up in the system, where it could spurt through manhole covers or backflood into homes and businesses, the combined sewer system is designed to overflow during rains and discharge excess wastewater directly to the closest major body of water. A 0.10” of rain in an hour or 0.40” of rain over an entire day is the minimum rainfall typically expected to wash pollutants from surfaces and carry them into storm drains.

The EPA gave consent decrees to over 750 cities, mandating that they must reduce CSO events. In December, 2010, the EPA established a total maximum daily load (TMDL) requirement. The TMDL requirement set the limits (maximum loads) on the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment from point and non-point sources that would be necessary to attain adopted water quality standards. The EPA took this action only after years of mostly ineffectual voluntary and required efforts of the various jurisdictions to reduce pollutants. In 2005, David Eckert produced a video about the problem of excessive stormwater flooding into our waterways after rain events. The video was appropriately named “Reining in the Storm,” which explains that there are 5 steps to creating clean water through Low Impact Development (LID). They are:

- Conserve sensitive lands
- Minimize pavement and building footprints
- Disconnect stormwater flow from current system and use water for other uses
- Infiltrate rainwater into groundwater through bioretention basins
- Educate, maintain and enforce

How to Reduce your Stormwater Fees? In an effort to mitigate the increasing costs, many owners are installing systems to help reduce stormwater runoff from their properties. Some areas of the country are already discounting stormwater fees for businesses that are taking efforts to alleviate the run-off from their properties. An innovative stormwater credit trading program will be put into place by Washington, DC’s Department of the Environment (DDOE). This will further incentivize facility owners to reduce runoff. With some planning and a little effort, many forward-thinking hotel owners are already
reaping the benefits of implementing LID practices. Some of the simple steps that we have implemented and can easily be adopted to reduce run-off are rainwater harvesting systems, bio-retention basins and green roofs.

Rainwater harvesting systems store rainfall for future use. Rainwater that falls on a rooftop or other impervious surface is collected and conveyed into an above- or below-ground storage tank (also referred to as a cistern or rain tank), where it can be used for non-potable water uses. A harvesting system typically has a catchment area, pre-treatment—such as first flush diverter, leaf screens, basket filters, storage and post-treatment—such as micron filter, UV filters or a series of filters. There are many benefits of rainwater harvesting; some being it is effective in reducing storm water runoff pollution. Collecting storm water from rooftops and directing it to storage decreases the volume and rate of run off. Non-potable uses may include landscape irrigation, exterior washing, flushing of toilets and urinals, fire suppression (sprinkler systems), supply for cooling towers, evaporative coolers, replenishment of water features and water fountains, laundry and more.

Bio-retention basins or rain gardens take advantage of rainfall and stormwater runoff in their design and plant selection. Rain gardens are typically sited close to the source of the runoff and serve to slow the stormwater giving it more time to infiltrate the ground. On the surface, a rain garden looks like an attractive garden. Below the surface of such a garden, a number of processes are occurring which mimic the hydrologic action of a healthy forest.

Green Roofs offer numerous environmental benefits, especially when installed in urban settings. Green roofs dramatically reduce stormwater runoff. The vegetation on a green roof absorbs and releases stormwater slowly over several hours, which purifies the stormwater and slows down the speed of the runoff, which mimics earth's natural process. Depending on the rain intensity and green roof's soil depths, 15 to 90% of the runoff can be absorbed. Water can then be returned to the atmosphere by evaporation and transpiration.

In summary, guest facilities that can implement simple best management practices provide a good return on the investment. More importantly, they demonstrate to their patrons that they are good stewards of the environment.

CHINA’S LOOMING WATER CRISIS
One unintended consequence of China’s spectacular economic growth is a growing water shortage. As rivers run dry, aquifers sink, climate harshens and pollution spreads. A report by the Chinese News Service stated that China has more than 400 cities short of water, some 110 of which are facing serious scarcity. A study by the China’s Ministry of Water Resources found that approximately 55% of China’s 50,000 rivers that existed in the 1990s have disappeared.

Bateman, Joshua, “China’s looming water crisis,” The Ecologist, February 25, 2014

Use PURE Moisturizers
Almost all moisturizing products contain chemical compounds—some of which are included on the FDA’s list of suspected carcinogens. Others, called parabens, are known endocrine disruptors because they can mimic the actions of estrogen in the body and may be associated with increased risk of certain types of hormonally-responsive cancers.

The skin is your largest organ and chemicals are absorbed through it, so I don’t use anything on mine that is not pure enough to eat. For more than 10 years, I’ve moisturized with pure cooking oils—sunflower, safflower or coconut oil for my face, body and even hair. I pick them up at the grocery store and pour them into pretty bottles for use in the bathroom. They are inexpensive, effective and safe for you and your whole family.

Dr. Jennifer Ashton, obstetrician and gynecologist, “New Year, New You,” USA Weekend, January 10-12, 2014

LIPSTICK STUBBS?
Lipstick left in the bottom of a tube can be easily removed with the other end of tweezers. Place in a small mint tin or tiny container. Use with a lipstick brush. Use all of your favorite lipsticks!

FINAL WORDS . . .
Beside the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials.

Lin Yutang, Chinese writer, translator, linguist and inventor

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