

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Latest hospitality environmental efforts target toiletries

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Marriott is getting rid of single-use plastic toiletry bottles. Image courtesy of Marriott

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As luxury hotel brands ramp up sustainability efforts with support from a growing number of environmentally-minded consumers, many have pushed to reduce reliance on single-use plastics.

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Hospitality brands are not alone in being proactive about eliminating single-use plastics, with city and state governments also looking to reduce plastic waste. After straws became the subject of widespread scrutiny last year, toiletries have become the latest target.

"Single-use plastics are a pretty easy concept for consumers to grasp," said Susan E. Selke, Ph.D, professor and director of the school of packaging at [Michigan State University](#), East Lansing. "If they buy a packaged product, consume or use the contents and then throw the package away, it's obvious that there is a contribution to the waste stream.

"So, back to our single-use plastic, if you shampoo your hair with a lot of very small packets or bottles of shampoo, you have a lot more waste at the end of a week than if you had used one larger bottle it's easy to see and easy to understand," she said. "And those small bottles or packets are less likely to be easily recycled than the larger ones, so that's an additional factor."

Tossing toiletries

Due to the sheer number of guests that hotels welcome, the hospitality industry can have a large impact by reducing or eliminating use of single-use plastics, such as small toiletry bottles or straws.

While these environmental efforts are not new Ace Hotels switched to refillable bottles from single-use toiletries years ago to reduce its environmental impact they are becoming more widespread. Crystal Cruises and Peninsula Hotels are among the luxury hospitality brands that have stopped supplying guests with plastic straws within the last 18 months.

After ridding its hotels of plastic straws, Marriott is tackling another source of plastic waste by replacing individually sized bottles of shampoo, conditioner and bath gel with larger pump containers. The program is already in place at

about 1,000 properties, and Marriott expects most of its hotels to make the switch by December 2020.

The larger pump bottles contain a similar amount of product as 10 to 12 individual bottles. Unlike the single-use containers that are often tossed into the trash, the bigger bottles will be recyclable ([see story](#)).

"If the choice is to go to dispensers rather than lots of small bottles or packets, there probably is a net benefit, both environmentally and from a cost perspective," Dr. Selke said. "But I suspect that, at least for manmade products, the true savings comes from avoiding product waste at least as much, and perhaps more, than from avoiding use of so much packaging.

"With modern dispensers you would be trading one relatively large pouch used as the package inside the dispenser for lots of small packages, and each customer would presumably use only as much of the toiletry as they wanted, reducing a large amount of product loss and waste," she said. "That should translate into significant savings."

Once all of its hotels make the change, Marriott estimates that the project will prevent about 500 million small bottles from going to landfills each year. This amounts to about 1.7 million pounds of plastic.

By next year, Peninsula Hotels plans to transition away from all single-use plastics, including toiletries along with plastic water bottles. According to the group's 2018 Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Report, these efforts will be supported with increased recycling and sustainable alternatives, but details are limited.

Earlier this month, the governor of California signed legislation that will prohibit hotels from offering complimentary travel-size bottles those under 12 oz. of shampoo and lotion. Properties with more than 50 rooms will have to comply with new bill by 2023.

A similar law banning hotels' use of small plastic bottles for personal care products has been proposed in New York state.

The success of such policies and regulations will depend, at least partially, on how consumers adapt their behaviors.

"If the choice were to provide large bottles in the hotel instead of single-use packages, with the assumption that guests would leave those for the next customer, you might well have issues of theft to deal with, not to mention concern about the potential for contamination," Dr. Selke said. "That's not something I would advocate."

California's newly-signed law does not impact single-use plastics in hospitals, nursing homes, residential retirement communities, prisons, jails or homeless shelters, according to [CNN](#).

Anti-plastic pushes

In the future, brands and consumers in hospitality and other sectors will likely continue evaluating and reducing their use of plastics.

Plastic water bottle consumption may be the next subject of environmental efforts, as indicated by Peninsula and Crystal. For instance, the cruise line's sustainability program Crystal Cares also focuses on reducing plastic bottle consumption in its dining venues, with a water filtration system that produces still and sparkling drinking water ([see story](#)).

Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong has also unveiled its own sustainable choice in the form of reusable glass bottles and an on-site water filtration system.

Previously, the hotel would use plastic, disposable water bottles by the cases, but now water is served in reusable glass bottles meant to significantly lower the output of plastic waste from the property. Additionally, Mandarin Oriental filters water on-site, allowing customers to easily refill their existing bottles rather than having to get a new plastic one each time they want more water ([see story](#)).

Beyond luxury hospitality, British department store chain Selfridges furthered its sustainability efforts by removing carbonated drinks in plastic bottles from its stores beginning in April 2018.

Part of its Project Ocean campaign, this move from the retailer follows other drink-related measures, including banning disposable water bottles and recycling coffee cups ([see story](#)).

"The public perception is that plastics are bad' in some fundamental sense," Dr. Selke said. "We don't see, for example, people getting upset about single-use paper napkins the way they do about single-use plastics.

"Yes, there's the argument that the paper is biodegradable, but there's also the fact that even food does not degrade

quickly in a modern sanitary landfill," she said. "Most of the public consciousness is typically focused on the end-of-life of the package or product the stuff we have to dispose of, by recycling, landfill, incineration, etc.

"However, this is usually a relatively small fraction of the overall environmental impact of that product or package. Much of the impact comes from making it in the first place, rather than from disposing of it."

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