

*How should the hospitality industry respond to increasing governmental demand for recycling?*

## RECYCLING in the Hospitality Industry

JAMES B. MURPHY  
*Florida State University*

**S**INCE THE PUBLICATION of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, public awareness of the interrelationship between man and his environment has grown dramatically. It would be difficult today to find a hospitality-industry operator or academician wholly unaware of ecological concerns and the finite nature of the earth's resources. As a sizable factor in the American economy — and one whose continued growth seems probable — the hospitality industry will be among those that must respond to the challenges of environmental responsibility. The question for operators and academicians alike is whether the hospitality industry can increase its commitment to environmental protection while maintaining product quality and customer satisfaction, and without increasing operating expenses.

Among the practices that have been suggested to preserve natural resources is recycling, but growing public familiarity with the concept of recycling has not meant a corollary increase in the use of recycling methods:

With the cost of energy rising faster than other factors of production, greater recycling is likely . . . though scarcely in the short run. America is currently recycling less than at any time in its history . . . and it will take some time to reverse the trend. . . . About ten per cent of total energy use in the U.S. could be saved through recycling. . . . only two per cent is saved this way today . . . and (the Delphi Panel) estimates the savings will climb slowly by six per cent by 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Will recycling become commonplace in the hospitality industry? This

<sup>1</sup>James O'Toole, *Energy and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), p. 117.

*James B. Murphy, Jr., received a B.A. in economics from the University of Florida and an M.B.A. from Michigan State's School of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management. Before joining the faculty of Florida State's department of hotel and restaurant administration, where he teaches courses in cost control and managerial accounting, he held positions with the Steak 'n Ale chain and was one of the owner-operators of a restaurant located in Orlando, FL.*



|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| Metals .....         | 12 |
| Paper .....          | 10 |
| Glass .....          | 8  |
| Heat .....           | 7  |
| Sewage .....         | 2  |
| Containers .....     | 2  |
| None .....           | 1  |
| Organic wastes ..... | 1  |
| Garbage/trash .....  | 1  |
| Water .....          | 1  |

tinue to climb and waste-heat technology improves, recapturing waste heat will almost surely grow increasingly more prevalent in the hospitality industry.

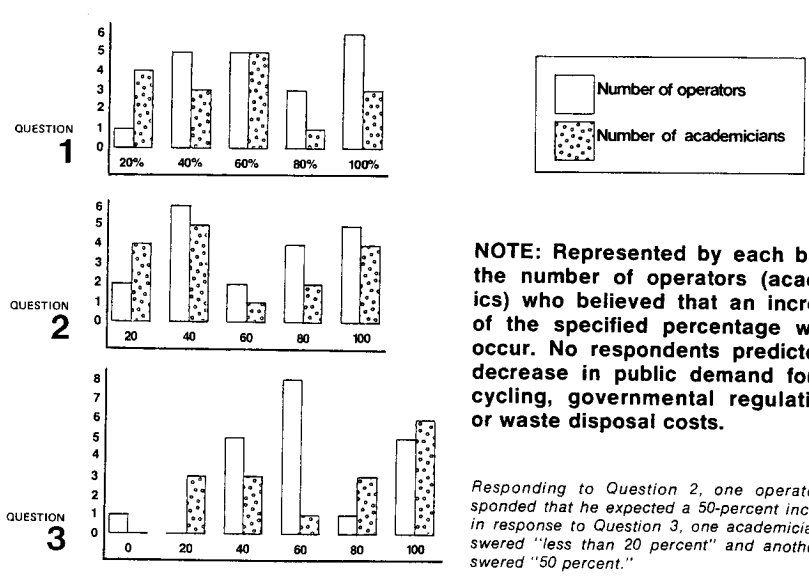
The recycling method mentioned most often by the academicians was metal recycling, including that of such materials as aluminum, steel, and iron. Metal cans command a price of anything from \$15 to \$300 per ton, depending on the kind of metal — aluminum fetches the highest price — and the use to which it is put after recycling. Storing used cans presents a problem for the operator, however: Sheraton Corporation notes that it takes a 20-cubic-yard container to store one ton of aluminum cans.

Paper recycling ranked third in the combined responses, and operators reported using a number of different paper-recycling techniques. One large firm recycles all paper used in its corporate headquarters — a practice that generates 10 tons of paper for recycling each month. The same firm uses recycled paper for half of its office copies,

**“Recycling will not be a question for the future, it will be mandatory! Particularly in the area of heat, where spiraling energy costs are going to force the industry to make some drastic changes....”**

Heat reclamation was the recycling practice cited most often by the combined sample. The various kinds of heat reclamation mentioned included that of dishwasher waste water, kitchen exhaust air, and waste heat from refrigeration equipment (air conditioners, coolers, and freezers). Over half of the operators who responded are now using some kind of heat reclamation; one obvious reason is that heat recovery is already a break-even proposition. As the cost of energy has risen, a number of devices that capture waste heat from various sources have become commercially available. As energy costs con-

**EXHIBIT 1: Responses to Survey Questionnaire**



even though recycled paper often costs more than virgin paper. The firm justifies this expense on the basis of corporate social responsibility.

Three operator-respondents currently recycle corrugated paper. Bern's Steak House uses a large paper shredder to shred all corrugated, which is then composted for use on its organic farm. Sheraton does some corrugated recycling throughout its operation, and is also experimenting with recycling newsprint and other kinds of paper. The feasibility of recycling paper varies from one area to the next; in New York, the operator receives \$12 per ton for corrugated and must deliver the material himself, while in Hartford, corrugated is worth \$25 per ton and is picked up.

Only two operator-respondents are currently recycling glass, and Sheraton's experience sheds some light on operators' reluctance to do so. At the location where Sheraton is exploring glass recycling, it must sort glass by color and remove all metal from the glass, with the rings on bottlenecks causing considerable difficulty. Pickup is free only for loads weighing a ton or more (a ton comprises five 55-gallon drums of crushed glass), and the price paid is a relatively modest \$15 per ton. Sheraton notes that it instituted its glass-recycling program strictly as an act of corporate social responsibility.

Other practices mentioned by the operators included the recycling of sewage effluent, containers (e.g., take-out containers and bulk containers for raw products), and grease. In addition to paying for grease and picking it up, firms that recycle grease provide containers that afford clean, easy grease disposal. Bern's Steak House was the only operation reporting any type of food-waste recycling; the firm uses all its food waste as feed for the poultry on its farm. Sheraton recycles bar soap left in rooms by grinding it and liquifying it chemically. The liquid soap is then used in its in-house laundry operations. Like many of the recycling efforts Sheraton is experimenting with, this procedure is not cost-effective at this point.

**I**n supplementary remarks, a number of survey respondents noted that the cost and time involved in recycling will probably prevent many operators from recycling unless the practice is mandated by government. Among the comments offered by the respondents:

Unless methods of recycling are extraordinarily simple, non-time-consuming and at no additional capital expense to the operator, I doubt that the majority of hospitality employers will be interested in pursuing them.

•••

Recycling is an interest primarily confined to the younger, more ecologically oriented and aware, generation. I do not think that participation in recycling projects will be voluntary on the part of industry members. Rather it will have to be government-sponsored and legislated much as the energy conservation effort has been.

•••

Recycling will not be a question for the future, it will be mandatory! Particularly in the area of heat, where spiraling energy costs are going to force the hospitality industry — and all industries — to make some drastic changes. As our supplies are depleted, we'll have to pay the ever-rising costs — which will lead to more recycling and overall conservation!

•••

We as a corporation have a major concern regarding the world's resource depletion and will support all efforts towards reducing wastes.

•••

I tend to think we might go back to permanent ware and the like. It is cheaper now, though inconvenient. As costs of disposables rise, we might become more attracted to permanent wares.

**T**he respondents are probably correct in their belief that public and governmental demand for recycling will grow in the years ahead. The

Environmental Protection Agency's *Fourth Report to Congress: Resource Recovery and Waste Reduction* gives several compelling reasons for increased use of recycling techniques, including substantial recent growth in waste generation, ecological problems attendant upon waste disposal, and the costs of waste collection and disposal.

Indeed, some governmental regulations requiring recycling are already with us. Guidelines for federal facilities meeting specified paper-usage levels mandate source separation and recycling of high-grade paper, newspaper recycling, and recycling of corrugated containers. At the state level, several states have approved deposit laws for beverage containers.

**H**eat reclamation is already cost-effective as a recycling method and will probably continue to be prevalent in hospitality operations. Recycling metal, particularly aluminum, might pay for itself in operations with a high volume of beverage sales and using canned, rather than bottled, beverages. Paper recycling, too, could well be a feasible practice in operations generating a great deal of paper and having adequate storage space. While fast-food and take-out operations are known for their almost universal use of disposables, the hospitality industry will have to investigate the use of recyclable containers for both raw and finished products.

It is clear that recycling is, for the most part, still not economically feasible for most hospitality operations. It is not unlikely, however, that recycling will become widespread in the years to come, providing such benefits as: lower waste-disposal costs through waste reduction; extra income through sale of recyclable material; reduced energy costs through heat recycling; and meeting our social responsibilities as a major industry. □