

Torgerson to use green vendors, conserve energy in hotels

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The state's largest hotel operator is going green.

Willmar-based Torgerson Properties Inc. has drafted an environmental mission statement and laid out steps toward becoming greener, including a preferred-vendor program and new policies aimed at conservation, waste reduction and recycling.

"Wherever we can do something that makes good sense from a business standpoint that doesn't reduce the quality of the experience for our guests and supports an environmentally friendly move, we're going to look it at," Torgerson President Mitch Peterson said.

The company operates 25 hotels and nine restaurants in Minnesota and Florida. It also has four more hotels under development.

Torgerson's environmental mission statement calls for the company to conserve energy, water and other natural resources; reduce waste; recycle and purchase recycled products; and reduce its use of toxic materials. The company also will give preference to suppliers that sell environmentally friendly products and minimize toxicity and packaging.

Torgerson is reaching out to environmental organizations such as Energy Star and Waste Wise and its utility providers for audits and guidance on best practices.

The company also has talked with St. Paul-based Ecolab Inc. about switching to a line of green cleaning supplies. "We have the largest presence of hotel rooms in the state, so to make a change like that across all the properties can



IMAGE PROVIDED BY TORGERSON PROPERTIES INC.

Torgerson Properties, which operates 25 hotels in Minnesota and Florida, will include a large green space at Homewood Suites by Hilton in St. Louis Park.

have a significant impact," Peterson said.

Most policies will be phased in over time. For example, the company will look into hybrid vehicles when it makes new purchases for its fleet and will start shifting from incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescents.

The company already has started to implement green initiatives at some of its newer properties. The Homewood Suites by Hilton under development in St. Louis Park, for example, will feature waterless urinals and a large green space.

Many other hotel chains have implemented some green policies aimed at cutting costs and appealing to environmentally aware guests, said Steve Sherf, senior vice president of GVA

Marquette Advisors in Minneapolis.

"I would expect a lot of momentum for the green movement for at least the immediate future," he said. "There's only so much an existing operation can do, but there's a lot that one can do for new construction. That's probably where the biggest impact will come."

Torgerson will designate an "environmental-impact representative" at each of its properties to oversee the new policies. The company also will assemble an "environmental impact board" of corporate staff and some property representatives. It will meet twice a year to measure the company's environmental performance against its mission statement. Employees also will re-

GREENER HOTELS

Willmar-based hotel developer/operator Torgerson Properties Inc. is launching a green initiative that calls for:

conservation of energy, water and other natural resources

reduced hazardous or solid waste, wastewater discharge and air emissions

increased recycling and purchasing recycled products

reduced use of toxic materials

the use of green landscaping techniques

employee training on environmental policies

designated "environmental impact representatives" at each property and the creation of a new "environmental impact board" to oversee the initiative

\$1,000 a month in grants toward community-based environmental projects

ceive annual training on the new policies.

Building in a level of accountability was an important component of the initiative, Peterson said. "It's a very trendy thing to throw out there right now. Everyone and their brother says they're green."

Torgerson also plans to donate \$12,000 a year to community-based environmental projects. The money will be awarded in the form of one \$1,000 grant or two \$500 grants each month.

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