



A Commitment to a Greener Future: Green Building International Conference and Expo 2002

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The US Green Building Council (USGBC) held their first international conference, The Green Building International Conference and Expo, in Austin, Texas November 13-15, 2002. The US Green Building Council is the foremost coalition of leaders from across the building industry working to promote environmentally responsible building.

The Green Building International Conference and Expo was the pre-eminent showcase for the world's leading edge green technologies in the building sector. The International Conference involved pre-conference meetings and conference tours as well as 220 exhibitor booths, 80 conference sessions, and 208 conference presentations. With 4189 individuals registered from 16 different countries, the Conference attracted a large group of people all concerned with improving building while considering environmental issues.

In keeping with the mission of the US Green Building Council's commitment to sustainable practices, Meeting Strategies Worldwide was contracted to ensure the conference was produced environmentally responsibly. Meeting Strategies worked with the USGBC staff, conference steering committee and all the conference vendors to determine feasible environmental strategies for the conference.

USGBC and Austin's convention community agreed to support the commitment to produce an environmentally responsible conference and make a positive impact on the community. Ultimately, the overall success of greening the conference inspired and heightened USGBC's commitment to take the conference's sustainable practices to the next level. Additionally, the conference altered the Austin convention community by providing an opportunity for them to learn and appreciate the environmental impacts of conferences.

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Minimizing Environmental Impacts:

Meeting Strategies Worldwide created the green procedures that led to the minimizing of the conference's environmental impacts. By organizing an auditing system to measure these impacts, Meeting Strategies Worldwide was able to prove through the audited results the success of the Green Building International Conference and Expo.

For increased minimization of environmental impacts Meeting Strategies Worldwide applied their Green Meeting Policies for Hotels agreement to the 10 hotels used for the Green Building International Conference and Expo. The agreement was comprised of environmentally responsible policies that the hotels had to abide by for the conference to be classified as green.

Green Policies for the Hotels used included:

- Changing sheets and towels every other day, instead of daily, unless requested by guest
- Not replacing consumable amenities daily unless they are gone
- Instructing housekeeping staff to shut blinds and shutting off the heat/air conditioning during the day in rooms while attendees are gone
- Using glass or china catering plates, cups and glasses (non-disposable), and using no Styrofoam under any circumstances.

These policies required little or no investment to implement. Most in fact realized cost savings.

Growing awareness and support for responsible use of the planet's resources requires commitment to additional conservation including:

- Serving condiments in bulk containers, not individuals servings
- Serving only shade-grown coffee
- Using cloth napkins instead of paper and coasters instead of cocktail napkins
- Donating all left over food to local food banks and all table scraps to local farms
- Using cleaning products that do not introduce toxins into the air or water

All of these policies were in effect during the conference according to prior agreements made with USGBC and the 10 Hotels used for the conference.

Air Quality: USGBC worked with the Leonardo Academy Cleaner and Greener Event Certification program to offset conference emissions. The emissions totaled the following in pounds: 6,107,400 Carbon Dioxide, 2,000 Sulfur Dioxide, 6,180 Nitrogen Oxide, 513 Particulates (PM10), 332 Particulates (PM2.5), and .0176 Mercury. The air pollution from the conference was offset by the purchasing of alternative fuel sources, retired emissions reductions, and renewable certificates. Additionally, the air quality of the exhibit hall was monitored and adjustments were made to improve the hall.

Energy Efficiency: In order to create a more energy efficient environment, Meeting Strategies Worldwide set up several green procedures.

- The lights, power and HVAC were reduced during move in and move out times in the exhibit hall.
- By eliminating saucers under coffee cups and not pre-filling drinking glasses the conference saved on energy use.
- By hotels offering the towel and sheets reuse program for guests, not replacing amenities unless consumed, and shutting off HVAC when guests were not in their rooms also reduced energy usage.

Water Conservation: To conserve water, Meeting Strategies Worldwide worked with the hotel and convention planners to set regulations on water usage and set up systems to make the most out of all water resources. Water was conserved by:

- Offering large containers of drinking water rather than providing individual bottled waters
- Not pre-filling drinking glasses thus saving 520 gallons of consumable water
- Not serving a saucer under the coffee cups, which saved 12,400 gallons of dishwashing water
- The towel and sheet reuse program at the hotels also conserved water usage.

Waste Minimization: The following were procedures observed by convention staff, organizers and participants:

- Condiments were served in bulk containers
- Juice and tea were served from large containers
- Garnishes on plates were eliminated
- Individual water bottles were not served
- Exhibitors were asked to minimize giveaways and promotional material
- By using china instead of disposable service ware 1,890 pounds of plastic was not used.

All of these things helped to reduce the amount of waste produced.

Environmental Purchases: Certain purchases were recommended by Meeting Strategies Worldwide to the USGBC and the conference community in order to take a responsible approach to the environment. Such purchases were: name badges printed on recycled paper and recyclable badge holders, conference bags made of recycled materials, and programs printed on recycled post consumer paper with soy based ink. Additionally, meals consisted of 10%-90% local produce averaging 14% overall and 10%-90% organic foods averaging 21% overall. These practices helped create a conference with a positive impact on the community by supporting sustainable practices.

Economic Indicators:

The policies set up by Meeting Strategies Worldwide not only saved money, but also had a beneficial effect on the environment and the community. Serving water in large refillable containers instead of supplying individual bottled water saved USGBC money and minimized packaging waste. The organic fruit in the gala dinner centerpieces were donated. Offering the opportunity for exhibitors to donate product at the end of the show saved them shipping costs and benefited the community. The hotels realized significant savings by instituting the Green Meetings Policies for Hotels by reducing water, energy and labor costs. The catering company also benefited by cost savings in serving condiments and juice in bulk, not pre-filling water glasses, and eliminating the use of garnishes and saucers under cups. For all involved the green policies had a positive impact.

Commitment to Change:

Upon the finish of this international conference, the USGBC realized the importance of hiring Meeting Strategies Worldwide to assist in the greening process. The firm, Meeting Strategies Worldwide, audited the current practices, worked with the committee, staff and vendors and made recommendations, monitored implementation and produced the final audit. The green policies were communicated to the attendees in the conference website and in the final program. Meeting Strategies Worldwide helped the USGBC and the Austin convention community realize that environmentally responsible changes needed to be made and how to go about committing to those changes.

All 10 hotels participating in the conference agreed to implement the Green Meeting Policies for Hotels. (Only five hotels actually followed through with the green policy requests.) The Austin Convention Center committed to making the green components of the meeting happen without any additional charges to the

USGBC. The convention center has also incorporated some of the policies implemented at the conference as the way they do business and is interested in continuing to improve their environmental commitment. The catering company has changed their purchasing choices of plastic glasses and recommends clients make responsible seafood choices.

Commitment to Conservation:

One of the main goals of the USGBC was to have a positive impact on the community. At the end of the conference Meeting Strategies Worldwide audited the requests made and the results of those environmentally responsible choices. As mentioned earlier

- All meals consisted of 10%-90% local produce averaging 14% overall
- Exhibitors contributed donations to Habitat for Humanity
- Comprehensive post consumer composting was arranged collecting 6.5 tons of food waste
- Responsible waste management was put into place to maximize the recycling of materials yielding 2 bales, approximately 2,400 pounds of cardboard, 5 gondolas (2 cubic yards each) approximately 5,000 pounds of paper, approximately 100 pounds of aluminum cans, and approximately 225 pounds of plastic bottles.

These results show the commitment to conserve as much as possible was made by all parties involved.

Conclusion:

The goals of the Green Building International Conference and Expo were to support sustainable practices and have a positive impact on the community and environment. With the help of Meeting Strategies Worldwide, the USGBC was able to accomplish these goals. Through the responsible choices made in lodging services, logistics, food and beverage, and promotion, minimization of environmental impacts and economic savings were achieved. As individuals on this planet we not only have a responsibility to be environmentally conscious, we have an extraordinary opportunity to make a very real difference. Meeting Strategies Worldwide ensures environmentally practices are implemented as a part of every conference.