

AENC Going Green

By Buz Buzogany

At the AENC Annual Meeting, June 13 - 15, 2010, in Concord, NC, Buzogany Associates was given the opportunity to conduct a green audit of the onsite meeting. The following article outlines how the audit was conducted, what we discovered on behalf of AENC and how the association's experience can translate to your meetings now and in the future.

The audit was conducted at the Embassy Suites Concord, and the Great Wolf Lodge, Concord, North Carolina. All pre and post conference activities were handled without Buzogany Associates involvement and cannot be effectively judged for their attention to environmental impact.

The green meetings mantra is reduce, reuse and recycle. The audit did not consider all facets of the meeting, including attendee modes of transportation (flights, cars, shipping, and their implied carbon footprint.), nor does it account for energy use by the facilities that supported the event, but this article will cover some of those issues for future event planning.

Because the Embassy Suites and Great Wolf Lodge were sponsors of the receptions, they made all food and beverage choices, and our report reflects their policies and procedures for the food, utensils, paper products and disposal of waste.

AENC Environmental Insight

Paper Products: There was obvious forethought regarding registration materials, promotional materials used to attract the membership, onsite efforts to minimize paper use, and the recycling of

badges. By simply planning ahead, using the electronic tools that are commonplace and making a conscious effort to be environmentally friendly, the meetings industry can make an incredible difference with its efforts.

Promotional Efforts - AENC sent no hardcopy materials to the membership, other than what was included in Success by Association magazine. All primary efforts to attract participation were done through email and the e-News newsletter, an effective, environmentally sound and fiscally responsible way to promote your events. The cost for paper creation, mailing and the waste created is enormous, and something we can control.

Registration - On-line pre-registration was encouraged, but there was not a "forms function" that allowed for electronic fulfillment by attendees. The registration form had to be downloaded, printed and faxed or mailed. To create an electronic form for meetings has become a relatively easy, painless and inexpensive method for saving paper, phone costs and time. Badges, agendas and/or other materials related to the meeting were not sent in advance, saving paper, postage and the impact of wasted delivery materials.

The on-site registration desk included an envelope (which could have been skipped) filled with a 4-page (double-sided use and stapled) meeting agenda, including sponsor & exhibitor recognition, bylaw changes and meeting notes from last year's annual meeting. Alternatively, considering the design of the meeting space itself (one location for

all breakouts, exhibit hall, lunches and one reception), 3 or 4 large menu boards (preferably reusable for future meetings or recyclable) outlining each day's events, timing, and sponsors would have been sufficient. Name badges were printed on recycled paper, and attendees were encouraged to turn their badges in prior to leaving the meeting. All of these issues are valuable environmental steps for all meetings and should be incorporated in the initial planning stages. Materials for individual choice events (speedway tour, BMW driving course, Great Wolf Park) were provided at the registration desk with a minimum of packaging or waste.

Sunday, June 13 Opening Reception – Great Wolf Lodge

When any organization is preparing its RFP for a meeting or social event, it is compelling to find out what that facility has in place and/or is willing to do to meet your green initiatives. The time to raise those questions is before you've made a final commitment or have actually arrived onsite for the event.

Food & Beverage – The reception was tailored by the property to use all local products (food and beverages), including labeling their point of origin in NC. Did anyone notice? Great Wolf is a Green Seal Certified Company (not confined to just the Concord property) and makes every effort to purchase from local vendors. Even the beer and wines served were made in NC.

Excess Food Distribution – All left-over non-perishable food items are donated by Great Wolf to Second Harvest and the New Life Outreach Men's Center. Due to the length of the reception on a Sunday night, none of the excess food could be

donated or salvaged, but an accommodation could be made in the future simply by making the pickup time for the food earlier.

Recycled – At Great Wolf, all plastic, bottles, cans and paper are recycled if separated by type. The bar was directed to separate all materials, and the food servers were challenged to separate what they could from trays.

Compost – There are no licensed facilities within a 25 mile radius of the Great Wolf property to handle compostable materials; therefore, the property does not consider composting in its current environmental plan. Today many major metropolitan areas and green convention centers provide composting options.

Utensils – Silverware, glassware and china were used at the reception; so no waste was created, other than napkins, which were 80% post consumer and 100% recyclable.

Decorations/Signage – We could not get accurate information onsite on what percentage of the decorations or signage was to be reused, but were told “all of it.”

Transportation – The arrangement of a bus loop from the Embassy Suites to Great Wolf was handled well, allowing for both convenience and a minimum of cars being driven by attendees. Were there electric or hydrogen bus options? In large urban areas, this is a reasonable question to ask and it helps reinforce your commitment to looking at every aspect of your meeting's impact on the environment.

Monday, June 14 & Tuesday, June 15

Food & Beverage - We were unable to get disclosure on the purchase of food (local versus shipped) used at any of the meals at the Embassy Suites and the Convention Center, but the property has an Eco Carolinas certification (see sidebar) and a written policy (see attachment) outlining their intent. At every meal function, china, glassware, cloth napkins and silverware was utilized, therefore preventing disposal concerns. All to-go products have been converted from plastic and paper to biodegradable and/or compostable products (where does it get composted?). No information was provided as to how or whether post event food is disposed of or if it is given to local food banks. All paper products (napkins) are made of recycled materials.

Exhibitors - Most had limited displays that could be packed and carted in their own vehicles. A post-event survey would need to be performed to find out how many of the exhibitors had a plan for disposal of excess booth materials or simply were throwing them away. A quick check of the bins within the exhibit hall did not show any excessive materials being randomly tossed out, but a clearly defined AENC advisory plan (or your organization's plan) for disposal could be given to exhibitors in the future. None of the displays were elaborate, nor demanded large power requirements. Load in and load out appeared to go smoothly without any major disruption and most shipping containers were reusable.

Meetings - The design of the AENC meeting (two featured speakers performing over multiple sessions during both days of the event), kept the eco-cost of speakers to a minimum (two flights and minimal promotional materials). There were



The commitment to our environment, our business and your confidence.

- We received the Eco Carolinas Certification for our commitment to help improve our environmental practices.
- We have implemented a number of waste reduction and recycling processes.
- We have agreed to continue to reduce our environmental impact when we purchase our supplies and dispose of our waste.
- We are dedicated to continuing our education for improving our environmental practices.
- We are proud to be self-governing and take our commitment to environmental improvement seriously.
- We hope you'll join us in our commitment to improving our environment.

Carolina Businesses Dedicated to Environmental Sustainability™

For more information about Eco Carolinas Certification, go to EcoCarolinas.com

no handouts, as information was electronically mailed prior to the meeting. Interested attendees could retrieve information from either the speaker's website or from AENC.

Water was made available in water pitchers and glassware was provided throughout the event. Coffee was in self-serve large containers and coffee cups were all china. Sodas and snacks in the

back of the convention hall were self-serve and one recycling bin was found in the room for the plastic soda bottles. The use of china and glassware is both economically and environmentally smart

A/V – AENC had a clearly defined audio and video pattern with only one location, one staging area and no breakouts. Power demands were not excessive and nothing could have been duplicated in any other form. The presentation screen could have posted the daily schedule usurping the need to have a printed agenda.

Planned Leisure Activities – Great Wolf Water Park, BMW zMax Dragway experience and the Speedway/Hendricks tour were handled with a minimum of environmental impact, although the BMW experience is a tribute to excessive abuse of carbon based products. The bus transport to the Speedway/Hendricks tour helped in minimizing the use of individual vehicles. Under the “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” theory, it would be extremely difficult to go to the heartland of NASCAR and not offer some related opportunities, but it can undermine the message of environmental concern that an organization wants to convey.

Opportunities – Considerations for Future Meetings

Request for Proposal – The meeting can be heavily influenced or dictated by your RFP, including the food and beverage choices (even by sponsors), purchase of local and/or organic foods, disposal of post-consumer waste, meeting room lighting, temperature controls, shipping options and much more. AENC is making conscious efforts to be an example that others follow, and may create a green RFP template in the future that can be distributed to all members for use as a guideline.

Exhibition – All exhibitors should provide an outline of their plan for post-event disposal of materials and waste. AENC or your organization can provide the options available at the property where the meeting will be held and encourage all participants to reduce, reuse or recycle their waste.

Exhibitor waste is one of the largely unrecognized problems for many association meetings. Without specific guidelines, hundreds of thousands of pounds of waste are generated each year and most finds its way to landfills. Simple rules that mandate that trucks must turn off their engines at loading docks can save millions of gallons of gas and improve the quality of the air we breathe. Every organization should create a meeting plan that includes instructions for the disposal of waste, transportation considerations and pre-trade show suggestions to exhibitors.

Carbon Footprint – Create a carbon credit purchase plan to both raise awareness for all exhibitors, sponsors and attendees. It can be performed by a number of organizations who assess the environmental impact of transportation and shipping, and it helps to underwrite best-practices for conservation of our resources. A number of associations including PCMA, Association Forum and ASAE-The Center, now have carbon credits as part of their meetings.

Conclusion

AENC has taken a number of positive steps in “greening” their meeting experience. The key is to have a green mindset and review each aspect of the meeting from the RFP process to the takeaways by attendees.

- Choose meeting locations that have environmental policies in place or are LEED

certified, and make sure that they want to work with you to minimize your event's impact on the environment.

- Transportation - request electric or hydrogen buses. Many NC school buses are now electric; so the trend has started. Ensure that all trucks that load and unload at the hotel or CVB dock are turned off during their stay.
- Award - AENC might create a green award to be given each year for the association and organization that has outlined a defined plan for making their meetings and office green. Associations can fill in a form created by AENC and write a surrounding historical reference to show the differences they have made.
- Registration - For all events, create online forms that allow the user to respond electronically. In the long run, it is less expensive, eco-friendly, and for the person filling out the form, much faster and easier.
- Food Distribution - Know in advance (by your RFP) how each property will distribute leftover food and how they will dispose of the waste. This has both great public relations impact and environmental impact.
- Partner with an organization that provides carbon credits and heighten awareness of the impact by carbon-based fossil fuels on everyone's health.
- Exhibition - Work with your exhibitors in advance to help them save money and become more eco-friendly. How materials are packed, shipped and discarded all have huge implications, and in most cases, there are cost savings that can be realized by thinking green.

Green Offices - This article has been driven by the impact of meetings, but your every day impact on the environment happens while getting to your office and/or at home. There is a separate green audit that can be performed at your office that will expose areas of waste, potentially discover huge cost savings and investigate personal habits that we can all do to make our carbon footprint much smaller. Did you know that offices located in buildings with an elevator often waste up to 50% of their heating and cooling in the elevator shaft? Or, that a simple accommodation to your windows can save up to 25% of your heating and cooling costs?

We are the stewards of our future and whether you are a tree-hugger or caveman, we all have a responsibility to make this a better world. The fact that we influence so many others by our actions is crucial in making how we conduct our meetings, our offices and our personal lives environmental examples to live by.

Buz Buzogany, Founder, Buzogany Associates, LLC, a strategy and sales consultancy, created, managed and operated the Green Procurement Exposition & Conference in 2008 and served on the APEX green meetings initiative in 2009. He is a proud member of AENC and conducts both meeting and office green audits, in addition to consulting on non-dues revenue, strategic planning and marketing.

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GREEN INITIATIVES

The Resort Energy & Green Efforts

Achieved Eco Carolinas Certification in 2009 for internal business practices including waste reduction and recycling

Modified lighting in stairwells

Ceiling/roof pyramid up lighting eliminated

Reduce usage of irrigation landscaping watering system

Motion sensors installed in most storage areas (lights-off default)

All departments use two-sided printing for internal documents

All departments recycle printer ink cartridges

Key cards returned by guests are deactivated and then recycled back into the system

Housekeeping

Wash/change sheets using scheduled intervals (more frequently if requested by guest)

Wash guests towels placed on floor – resulting in lower energy/water use

All white office papers are now recycled

Engineering

Recycle all compact fluorescents to reduce energy costs and reduce carbon footprint

Recycle all glass incandescent lights to reduce carbon footprint

Recycle office paper to reduce carbon footprint

Digital Thermostats to produce most reliable heating/cooling

HVAC System is controlled Energy Management Program to maximize efficiency

Guest suite toilets are 1.6 gallon/flush to reduce water usage

Air filters changed on scheduled basis to reduce energy use

Rechargeable batteries for all audio visual equipment that use AA, AAA, and 9 volt batteries

Banquets/Kitchen

All cans and bottles are now recycled

All white office papers are now recycled

Water served on an as-requested basis during banquet functions to reduce water waste

Goals for 2010

Track/measure unsorted waste volume

Goal is to decrease volume by 10% compared to 2009

Track/measure sorted (recycled) waste volume

Goal is to increase volume by 10% compared to 2009

Communicate with all existing vendors to combine efforts to enhance green initiatives

Work with and apply for an Energy Star government rating

Work with local and state agencies to identify ways to enhance our green efforts