



Press Release
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Ascot Park Hotel commits to chemical-free status

Ascot Park Hotel executive manager Peter Ridsdale is not your stereotypical greenie, but his environmental initiatives are having a huge impact.

Today, Invercargill's most expansive accommodation complex will commence cleaning all hotel rooms without using chemicals – instead entrusting water and a microfibre cloth with the hygiene task.

“We are shaping up to be a market leader in New Zealand with the chemical-free cleaning of our hotel guest rooms, and that’s something we are immensely proud of,” Mr Ridsdale said.

“We’ll be pouring roughly \$6000 less chemicals down the drain each year and that’s exciting ... there is no question that you do feel good about the fact you are doing something valuable for the environment.”

Mr Ridsdale knew he was on the right track when the hotel's chemical supplier moved to reduce usage through intense monitoring as it became clear alternative options to chemicals were being investigated.

“Last year we spend \$12,000 on room chemicals and actions taken in a short period of time promised to reduce that by about half – a good reason for anyone to review costs in this area,” he said.

Admittedly, there was a psychological hurdle to overcome initially.

“It’s about changing perceptions. There are generations of New Zealanders who have cleaned with chemicals all their lives ... the fact good old water can effectively get a better result takes a bit to get your head around,” Mr Ridsdale said.

“We’ve trialled it over the past few months and now we’ll implement it in all hotel rooms and then look at progressing it to other areas like the kitchens.

“There has been a real commitment from all staff to embrace the concept.”

Scientific testing produced surprising evidence in favour of the environmentally-friendly microfibre cloth option – discovered after Mr Ridsdale set housekeeper Lynese Boyes the challenge of initially changing at least one chemical to organic.

An eight-week trial ensued where 10 rooms were cleaned simply with a microfibre cloth and water while another 10 on the opposite side of the hallway were scrubbed with chemicals.

Laboratory results were “staggering”. The bacterial count in rooms cleaned chemically was 179, while in the microfibre rooms it was just 11.

Mr Ridsdale concedes he was surprised.

“I had no idea ... it just really goes to prove rooms can be cleaned with a microfibre cloth better in many respects than with chemicals,” he said.

“Not only that, but the on-flow effects are also really positive. The housekeeping team are excited as some of them are no longer having reactions to chemicals because essentially they are only using water and fibre to clean the room.”

Asthmatic guests had raved about the rooms and an international travel writer recently deemed it the cleanest he had ever stayed in “anywhere in the world”.

“The only real downside is the room really doesn’t smell like anything at all but they’re super clean and there is virtually no visible dust in the air.”

Today was a definite milestone in the Ascot Park Hotel’s four-year “sustainable journey”, which began with a sustainability audit conducted by Carolyn Dean, of Future Genz, with assistance from Venture Southland.

“Every tourism meeting you go to nationally there’s this huge rhetoric about ‘you’ve got to become more sustainable’. I believe the industry has listened and once you get on the sustainability bike, it’s quite easy to keep riding,” Mr Ridsdale said.

The Invercargill Licensing Trust’s flagship hotel had secured three “green” conferences as a direct result.

“We are thrilled that steps we are taking are also having a commercial impact,” he said.

“There’s a network of people that continues to grow at astonishing speed and there’s a catalyst to making New Zealand more sustainable – we’re certainly taking that on board.”

The Ascot Park Hotel’s environmental focus has also extended to a project to rejuvenate Dog Island, joining forces to the Department of Conservation and Maritime New Zealand to investigate its historical, ecological and tourism potential.

A \$10,000 funding injection came from the hotel’s guest washing machines.

“It’s a whole evolving thing ... Dog Island is a long-term commitment and I believe it will be a very exciting project for Southlanders with what is an iconic island,” Mr Ridsdale said.

“Potentially it could also favour the hotel because I anticipate somewhere down the track it will attract tourists in its own right and Invercargill needs more tourists.”

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