

New England Travel

The war against single-use plastics heads to the bathroom

By Linda Laban
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Last fall, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill that bans hotels in the state from supplying toiletries in mini plastic containers. The law is scheduled to go into full effect by 2024 and is an effort to reduce plastic waste and its production costs, both of which take a heavy toll on the environment.

While Massachusetts and other states haven't yet legislated against bathroom minis, many Boston area hotels have ditched small plastic bottles in the bathroom and vastly improved their plastic footprint.

The Lenox switched to large refillable dispensers in 2015. Dan Donahue, president of Saunders Hotel Group, owners of The Lenox, the Beacon Hill Hotel & Bistro, and Comfort Inn & Suites in Revere, which also use

dispensers, estimates the switch has cut "upwards of 350,000 little plastic bottles a year" at The Lenox alone.

"It wasn't as popular at first as you might expect," says Donahue. "There's a stigma to having dispensers in a luxury hotel, and guests thought we might be doing it to save money. So, the first thing was finding a product that fit a luxury hotel. Secondly, we had to make sure the dispensers were tamperproof, and thirdly, we had to find a pump that wouldn't fail. What we put into the dispenser is important, but having it work smoothly day-after-day was also a priority. Guests nowadays mostly respond positively, if at all."

The Inn at Hastings Park in Lexington, which is a member of the prestigious luxury Relais & Chateaux group, switched to dispensers two years ago. They checked out 150 samples to find the right product, and then had to configure each for the different bathrooms.

There is also the daily maintenance. "They have to be spotless," says the hotel's owner Trisha Pérez Kennealy, adding that maintaining the dispensers means an extra 10 to 15 minutes to clean each room.

"It takes a lot more work to make sure they are perfectly clean and perfectly filled. We take housekeeping very seriously. They need to look brand-new. We have a whole area dedicated to bottle care."

"It's completely worth it, though," she adds. "It's not just the bottles that

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TRISHA PÉREZ KENNEALY,
Owner of Inn at Hastings Park in Lexington

we're cutting out; there's the packaging that they are shipped in, which includes bubble wrap and plastic film. This shift is much better for the hospitality business's future."

During its renovation in 2017, the Revere Hotel Boston Common not only added two different scented sets of shampoo, conditioner, and body wash to the showers, but put wall dispensers over the vanity that hold hand soap, body lotion, and, unusually, face wash, too.

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Shampoo, conditioner, and body wash dispensers at The Inn at Hastings Park (near right) and The Lenox.



PHOTOS BY LINDA LABAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Luxury hotels are joining in the effort to curb single-use plastics

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"We gave more options to the customer and made it look attractive to use," says general manager Tim Brett, "and we're saving around 300,000 plastic bottles from going into the environment. It's a win-win," he adds.

"My first reaction when we added them was that there would be some pushback from guests," he recalls. "But, with every year, people are getting more and more environmentally-conscious. We actually get a lot of good feedback now."

Kimpton Marlowe in Cambridge is part of InterContinental Hotels Group, which has committed to switching its portfolio of around 843,000 guest rooms to bulk-size bathroom amenities by the end of 2021.

Opened in 2003, Marlowe switched more than five years ago.

"Conservatively, we have saved around 225,000 to 250,000 bottles a year," says general manager Joe Capalbo. "We reduced our plastic waste and we still give guests a high quality product. Feedback has been positive. People rarely comment, really, and if they

do, it's usually curiosity about the initiative.

"Having the right product was important," xxxhe continues. "Guests really like this one, and we sell it in gift sets. Operationally, we did wonder how many of the bottles would walk," he said of guests turning the multi-use container into a single-use one by taking them away with them. "But it has not been an issue."

The Seaport Hotel, which opened in 1998, was an early dispenser adopter. In 2010, it began replacing the usual small bottles of shampoo and condi-

tioner with wall dispensers containing the same product. Also, hand-soap bars were replaced with liquid soap in attractive refillable glass containers.

Jim Carmody, the hotel's vice president and general manager, estimates it cut around 240,000 bottles annually from its recycling and waste, twice as much as is claimed on the dispenser's explanatory label.

"I was nervous about the move," admits Carmody. "I wondered if the consumers were ready to accept the change. We delayed switching over completely and did it gradually, floor

by floor. At first, opinion was quite polarizing, and reviews ran to either hating or loving it.

The hotel keeps some small bottles on hand for customers who insist on them.

"It's very rare that anyone asks for them now," he says. "People are more educated on the issue of plastics. Expectations have altered and most guests nowadays understand why we changed and welcome it."

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