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# RA RepublicanAmerican

*Easy living is ...* **GOING GREEN**  
State offers hotels environmental seal



JIM SHANNON REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**A guest makes her way to a waiting car at the Saybrook Point Inn & Spa in Old Saybrook on Friday. The inn is one of three Connecticut hotels that has been designated an environmentally friendly hotel.**

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GREEN: Application available on DEP Web site

## **BY MICHAEL PUFFER**

### REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

After loading canvas shopping bags filled with organic vegetables and biodegradable cleaning products into a hybrid car for the trip to an energy efficient home, the environmentally conscious consumer might wonder "where can I go for a break?"

As of July, the State of Connecticut has three suggestions, having qualified two hotels and one bed and breakfast for its new "Green Lodging" seal of approval.

For \$100 to \$180 a night, travelers can stay at the Inn at Lower Farm, a 270-year-old farmhouse in North Stonington converted into a four-room bed and breakfast.

There visitors can relax in a rustic setting just outside Mystic, confident that proprietors Mary and Jon Wilska are going the extra mile for Mother Earth. The couple have always composted, recycled and encouraged guests to reuse towels to save water. The only difference now is that the state is recognizing their efforts.

Hotels interested in the green seal of approval can fill out a checklist-based application on the state Department of Environmental Protection Web site.

Does a lodging establishment cut up used office paper for note pads or recycle printer cartridges? Each are worth two points. Adopting and displaying an environmental policy for staff and customers is worth up to 10 points. Low-water landscaping and low-impact fertilizers and pesticides can earn up to five points. A solar heating system for the pool is another five points.

A hotel reaching 100 points can qualify for the state certification. Department of Environmental Protection staff review applications and can respond usually in just a few weeks.

"We've been trying to do a lot of conservation as it is," Mary Wilska said. "When I started filling out the form, I realized we did quite a lot."

Steven Gardiner, general manger of the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Cromwell, said a few of his corporate customers already have noted the green designation the 215-room hotel is trumpeting on its Web site.

"We had a couple our clients say they are interested in doing more business with us because of the green designation," Gardiner said. The Crowne Plaza has launched various environmental initiatives, though not simply for the benefit of the state's green tag. A \$20,000 investment in energy efficient lights will pay for itself in a year. A new no-chlorine filtration system for the swimming pool cost \$4,000, but savings on chemicals will cover that in about two years.

“I get a long-term savings, but it’s good for the environment too, so why wouldn’t you do it?” Gardiner said.

The state aggressively marketed the green certification to establishments throughout the state. So far, only five have applied. One was turned down.

Another’s application is being reviewed.

The initial review relies heavily on the honesty of proprietors, but there will be a few random audits each year.

That’s important, because some green certifications backed with little more than promises, said Elizabeth Sanberg, a co-founder of [gogreentravel.com](http://gogreentravel.com), an Internet blog dedicated to low-impact travel.

“Some certifications you pay a few dollars, check a few boxes and you get green certifications,” Sanberg said. “This is definitely a big step up from other certifications.”

Truly ecoconscious travelers might want to call ahead and speak with hotel staff about their environmental practices, Sanberg suggested.

Connecticut’s adoption of a “Green Lodging” certification owes much to the owners of Saybrook Point Inn and Spa in Old Saybrook. The posh seaside resort already has earned a number of environmental accolades, but owners believed Connecticut should adopt a certification system like those already in place in several other states.

Connecticut’s system was largely borrowed from one in place in Maine, which already lists 104 green lodging places.

Connecticut DEP staff say the Saybrook hotel is a standout. It has a special low-chlorine filtration system for its pool, rooftop solar panels and special houses for endangered shore-birds.

Guests paying \$199 to \$500 a night and eat organic food.

Chefs also try to buy local, cutting down on the pollution of trucking, shipping or flying food long distances. When disposable silverware is needed, Saybrook Point uses cutlery made from biodegradable cornbased plastics. “Much of what we sell is dependent on the natural beauty of our location,” Saybrook Point Inn General Manager Andrew Abels said. “It just makes sense to do what we can to preserve that natural beauty.”

*Plan on staying at a hotel similar to the Saybrook Point Inn and Spa in Old Saybrook?  
Visit [www.rep-am.com](http://www.rep-am.com) and tell us.*

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**Solar panels were installed on the roof of the Saybrook Point Inn & Spa in Old Saybrook last year.**

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**COURTESY OF SAYBROOK POINT INN & SPA**

**The panels are just one of the many changes the inn has made as part of their green initiatives.**