

BENCHMARK® Announces Program to Eliminate Single Use Plastics from all 80 Properties

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The Woodlands, (Houston) Texas , December 2018 ... *"I want to say one word to you. Just one word... Plastics."* Those immortal lines from *The Graduate* , an iconic film released in 1967, was meant to convey the opportunities offered by the plastics industry for the newly minted college grad, Benjamin Braddock. Today, plastic products, built to last thousands of years, are now presenting not opportunities, but serious and complex environmental challenges.

[BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company](#) , is addressing one of the most critical issues – the approximately eight million tons of plastic products that annually pollute our oceans, rivers and coastlines, endangering wildlife, littering beaches and releasing toxins into the water. Many of those products, known as “single use plastics”, comprise a significant part of those eight million tons and they are very heavily used by hotels and restaurants. Benchmark is initiating an ambitious program to reduce use of plastics in all 80 of its luxury hotels, resorts and conference centers, starting in 2019. The project, Single Use Plastic Reduction, will combine innovative technology, comprehensive policies and procedures, introduction of new, sustainable products and a sophisticated messaging program to educate hotel staff and guests as to the importance of the initiative.

“Benchmark is targeting three items first – cocktail picks, coffee stirrers, and especially, plastic straws,” says Patrick Berwald, Benchmark’s vice president of Food and Beverage. “It’s just the beginning of our journey into sustainability in all areas of food and beverage.” He cites plastic straws are the biggest offender, noting that in the United States, we use 500 million plastic straws per day. These single use plastic items are small but their intensive use adds up to tons of waste. Used throughout hotels, they appear not only in bars and restaurants, but at meetings, special events, room service and in more casual food outlets such as Grab n’ Go and informal outlets at golf courses, pools, beaches and spas. Last year, Benchmark properties used 2.8 million plastic straws, 1.7 million plastic stirrers, and 120,000 plastic cocktail picks. As an interim effort until all plastic straws are replaced with paper, Benchmark properties are providing straws only on request. Future efforts will address other unsustainable items such as pizza boxes, Styrofoam and plastic coffee lids, and Benchmark’s sustainability journey will move forward from there.

How did straws evolve from a ubiquitous paper tube to an environmental threat? Although the first paper straws were invented and mass produced in 1888 by American inventor, Marvin Stone, 3000-year old drinking straws have been found in ancient Sumerian tombs. Sumerians used them to drink beer and avoid the by-products of fermentation that sank to the bottom. Some of the straws that were found were crafted of gold and lapis lazuli, so the departed could sip in style throughout the afterlife.

Marvin Stone was inspired by drinking a Mint Julep through a stalk of rye grass. These stalks passed for straws but were unsanitary and quickly fell apart. Stone wrapped strips of paper around a pencil, glued the paper together and sipped his cocktail in comfort. He developed ways to mass-produce the items and the straw was born. Many variations followed over the years and more durable and flexible plastic versions largely replaced the paper straw.

While Benchmark is not the first company to address this issue, its smaller size allows it to effectively manage the program, ensure standardization and the company is implementing it in a relatively short time. “Benchmark includes 80 hotels and conference centers under four brand names - Benchmark Resorts & Hotels, Gemstone Collection, Benchmark Conference Centers and etc.venues, with over 120 food and beverage outlets,” notes Patrick Berwald. “We are starting with 42 hotels and resorts domestically and expect to expand from there.” Larger hotel companies including multiple brands and thousands of outlets, have a much more difficult task supplying these outlets and making these initiatives standard in every property.

The hospitality industry is making a significant effort to solve this problem and that results in a high demand for sustainable products. Fortunately, Benchmark has secured a supplier that will provide the required number of items including paper straws that are BPA and chemical free, and products made from renewable sources such as bamboo and wood. In addition to availability, hotels must ensure proper disposal of these goods and introduce quality control of the products and their use.

The success of Benchmark’s Single Use Plastic Reduction initiative depends on a carefully crafted messaging program that will reach all employees, suppliers and most important, our guests,” says Patrick Berwald. The communications will use a variety of digital technologies, staff training programs and a public relations campaign to disseminate the message and ensure positive participation,” he says.

“This requires tremendous cooperation and coordination at every level of our organization,” Patrick Berwald asserts. Operations, food and beverage and of course, our guests – all hands are needed to make this a success. He notes that there may be some resistance or concerns that a smaller hotel company won’t be able to significantly turn the tide of plastic waste. “Benchmark’s motto is ‘Be the Difference’ to our guests and associates. We are in this effort for the long haul and I am confident that our journey in sustainability will indeed make a dramatic difference in eliminating plastic products from our food and beverage products and help keep Earth’s oceans clean.”

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company.

[BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company](#) , is a leader in the development, management, and marketing of independent, soft branded, and experiential hard branded resorts, hotels, and conference centers. In addition to the company’s award-winning full service [Benchmark Resorts & Hotels](#) , its lifestyle and luxury [Gemstone Collection](#) , and its industry-leading Benchmark Conference Center division, [etc.venues](#) is a leading provider of contemporary city centre venues for meetings, signature events, and conferences. BENCHMARK’s combined portfolio features more than 80 unique projects across three continents. The company is passionately committed to delivering personal, inspiring, and memory-making experiences, driving total revenue and profitability, and cultivating an award winning, “Be The Difference” culture for all its employees. BENCHMARK, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, with offices in London, England; Miami, Florida; Park City, Utah; Scottsdale, Arizona; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle, Washington; and Tokyo, Japan. www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com To become a fan on Facebook,

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