



## **Efficient Laundry at Hilton Americas–Houston Becomes Profit Center**

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HOUSTON—How do you get a laundry facility that covers 27,000 square feet into the basement of a downtown Houston, Texas hotel? It's easy; you build the hotel on top of the laundry. Most hotel laundries are put in as an afterthought to the construction of the hotel and as such have limited space for equipment. The laundry facility located in the basement of the Hilton Americas–Houston was included in the initial building of the structure and exists as the largest laundry facility in the United States Hilton family of hotels.

The massive equipment, including two tunnel washers, was put into place prior to the construction of the upper 24 floors of the building, allowing the hotel to have an on-property laundry facility that rivals most commercial laundries. Washing and finishing 625,000 pounds of laundry per month, the Hilton Americas–Houston laundry facility compares in size only to select few large hospital facilities in the city, and maintains a staff of 30 employees, two assistant managers, one lead and one production supervisor.

Central to the laundry are the two massive tunnel washers that have allowed the Hilton Americas–Houston to take a department that is normally an expense and turn it into a revenue producing department. The high-efficiency units have allowed the hotel to take on ongoing commercial laundry contracts for other city-wide hotels and convention centers, washing 100 pounds of linens every two and a half minutes, with a current goal of an average of 2,000 pounds per hour by the end of the day. When working at maximum capacity, the system can wash up to 5,550 pounds of linens per hour, utilizing only one day-shift of workers. With this vast potential available, the property is currently in the process of bringing in additional commercial jobs to further increase the revenue production of the laundry department while maintaining the same energy usage and man-hours needed.

The tunnel washers are an ultra-efficient cleaning system. Green machines by design, the efficiency of the equipment allows the automated wash to be done quickly, thus making it possible to shut the power off and save energy. Not as labor-intensive as most hotel

laundries, the washers automatically wash and dry linens and towels after an initial presorting.

### Efficient Sorting System Saves Energy

The sorting system utilized by the Hilton Americas–Houston is a state-of-the-art unit, not used in most hotel laundries. The E–Rail sorting system weighs the sorted linens and towels, and is thus able to efficiently send the loads to the tunnel washer based on a pre-programmed type and weight load. Since the items are presorted before they go into the tunnel washer, they are already sorted before they go into the dryers, thus optimizing energy efficiency of the machines and reducing man-hours needed to operate them.

The tunnel washers can wash 900 pounds of laundry at the same time, through nine wash zones. Zones one through four are wash zones; zones five through eight, bleach zones and zone nine is the finishing zone. The water from zone nine is piped back into zone one in order to reduce water usage. The reused water retains some of its original chemicals, thus also reducing the quantity of chemical needed for cleaning. The system's chemicals are checked once a week to ensure the proper balance since things such as temperature and humidity can make a difference in the optimal level of chemicals.

From the tunnel washers, the linens are moved directly into the four 250–pound capacity dryers located in the laundry. The dried linens then move to one of the many folding machines, capable of being set for small towels, mats and hand towels, plus many other differing folds as specified by the property for which a commercial load is being done. Also, a manual-fold area is available, although it is rarely needed due to the high efficiency of the folding machines. From the dryer, sheets are fed into a machine that hangs and spreads the sheets to be ironed, then folds them, all automatically.

During Hurricane Katrina, the Hilton Americas–Houston laundry played a pivotal role in aiding victims of the storm. The laundry was responsible for washing all of the clothing and linens for the displaced New Orleans residents being housed at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center plus processing and cleaning all laundry trucked in to the city from New Orleans area Hilton properties, while still maintaining their regular laundry schedules.

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