

Propane Powers Rural Hospitality Industry

Propane provides the rural hospitality industry with reliable energy for a variety of applications ranging from cooking and heating to water and patio heaters. A recent survey conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide probes the energy decision-making process in the rural hospitality industry and offers some keen insights.

The Decision-Maker

- Within larger accommodations organizations, decision-makers are often directors or vice presidents in these departments: operations, engineering, facilities, design, or franchising. In smaller operations, it's the owner or partner most likely making energy decisions.
- Nine in ten (90 percent) accommodations respondents say they have *great influence* in determining energy sources used in their properties.
- About two in five respondents (nearly 40 percent) have standard facility designs that specify gas appliances.

Making the Energy Decision

- Energy decision-makers often choose an energy source early on during the planning phase of a new facility.
- Energy decisions are typically made in three stages of the design process: design (36 percent), beginning of the project (30 percent), or at the blueprint stage (26 percent).
- When presented with a list of eight potential factors to consider, **reliability** and **availability** of an energy source ranked the highest. Cost is also a consideration, but concerns about price can be overcome by focusing on reliability, efficiency, and availability.

Influencers

- Energy **marketers** and providers **have the most influence** when it comes to affecting the decision-making process.
- Information provided by local and county governments also influences decision-makers.
- Recommendations and word-of-mouth also carry weight in the decision-making process.

Energy Use Habits

- The desire to use gas and lack of access to natural gas is the driving force behind multiple application propane users.
- Cost tends to be an issue as well, since electricity is less expensive in many rural areas.
- Propane is mainly used for cooking and water heating in rural areas.
- A surprising number of accommodations providers use propane for clothes drying.
- Studies show that attitudes towards propane will increase as one becomes more familiar with it and/or uses it more.

Opportunities

- Energy decisions are also made based on equipment availability for each energy source and how well each energy source meets proprietors' needs.
- Likewise, cost is more than just the price of the fuel, but overall ownership costs including equipment costs and energy efficiency comparisons.
- Propane marketers can use educational materials to show not only the benefits of propane, but also *demystify* propane for non-users.
- Propane marketers should include a value message (e.g., efficiency, reliability) in the information they provide potential customers to emphasize the ownership benefits in terms other than cost.

Source:

Wirthlin Worldwide "2003 Rural Accommodations Survey Research" (2003)