

HOTELS

GLOBAL UPDATE: OPERATIONS



A guest vehicle charges at The Ritz-Carlton Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Charging ahead

Hotels are installing vehicle-charging stations despite lack of use.

By Nathan Greenhalgh,
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Hotel companies are betting on the long-term success of electric and hybrid vehicles by installing electric vehicle-charging stations, predominantly in North America, even absent consumer demand for such stations. The percentage of North American drivers using plug-in electric vehicles remains a sliver (hybrids represented around 2% of new car purchases in October 2011, according to a HybridCars.com/Baum & Associates report), but that has not broken the wave of hotels installing on-site charging stations.

The Umstead Hotel & Spa, a 5-star, 150-room property in Cary, North Carolina, paid for the recent installation of its charging stations at a cost of US\$7,400. The Umstead anticipates keeping the stations as a permanent feature despite a lack of use now. "We have had very limited usage so far, but are hoping for more as the trend grows," says General Manager Jim

Belay. "Less than 2% of our guests currently drive electric vehicles."

Independent hotels like The Umstead are hardly alone in investing in charging stations. Marriott International now has 32 charging stations at 17 properties globally. "We are working with several providers to build electric vehicle-charging infrastructure," says Felicia McLemore, Marriott's director of global corporate relations. "Up to now, the hotel management and ownership entities have incurred the bulk of the cost of the station installations. Government grants have been available to help."

Charging stations are part of a larger Marriott project to offer convenient access for business travelers to rental electric vehicles with car rental company Hertz Corp. and GE Energy.

Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Stamford, Connecticut, has installed charging stations at each property managed under its eco-friendly Element by Westin brand. "The stations aren't seeing a ton of use, likely due to the fact that there just still aren't that many electric vehicles on the road," says Starwood spokeswoman Stacy Trevino. "The hotels are responsible for the cost of installation."

Installation has not been confined

to that brand. Starwood subsidiary The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. installed a charging station at The Ritz-Carlton, Charlotte last year a few weeks before Charlotte, North Carolina's municipal government put 26 public charging stations into service throughout the city.

Kimpton Hotel and Restaurant Group, San Francisco, recently installed charging stations at Hotel Monaco Portland and Hotel Palomar Dallas in partnership with ECotality North America at no cost to the hotel company. The charging stations are free until April 2, says Sam Tucker, Hotel Palomar Dallas director of sales and marketing, at which time there will be a fee of approximately US\$0.40 a kilowatt per hour.

Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, Toronto, has installed charging stations at three of its hotels in British Columbia at a cost of C\$10,000 (US\$9,770). "There are two stations installed at The Fairmont Waterfront, and one station each at The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver and The Fairmont Empress," says Sharon Owen, energy manager at The Fairmont Waterfront. "Even though we do not have a high level of demand for them currently, we are confident they will be in demand in the near future."

[editorial]



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