



Twelve common housekeeping errors found in many hotels

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle®, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management®! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

As an educator, author, hospitality consultant, and former hotel manager, I tend to notice the various shortfalls in both service and cleanliness standards that regularly occur at hotels where I stay or visit when traveling. Whether it be for business travel or pleasure, it is easy to notice when the housekeeping staff at many hotels fail to meet the standards associated with their brand or the expectations of their guests.

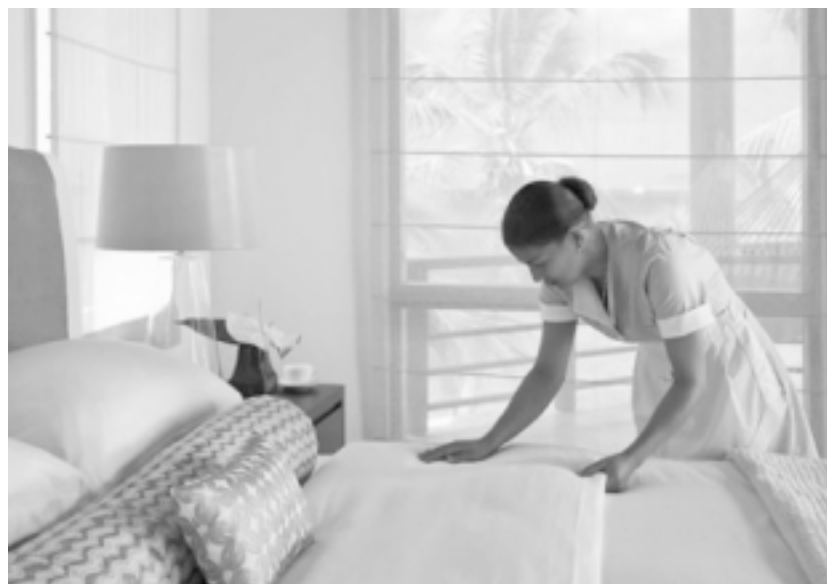
Presented here are twelve errors or inappropriate housekeeping work practices that can commonly be found in many hotels just by walking the halls as a guest.

1. Unlocked housekeeping closets. Unsecured housekeeping closets on guest floors are an open invitation to disaster. Unlocked closets afford a haven for criminals to hide, inebriated guests to get lost and pass out, and young children to explore. What's stored inside these closets? Cleaning chemicals, amenity supplies, extra linens, rollaway beds and cribs, and of course housekeeping carts. If you decide to leave these rooms unlocked you should expect excessive shrinkage in your linen and amenity inventories, possible vandalism, and perhaps children playing with or ingesting chemicals. Don't be surprised if you find a homeless person squatting there temporarily or a young couple seeking to use it for adult-related activities. And if your Front Desk gets a call late at night about housekeeping cart races being conducted on the sixth floor... well, you get the idea. There is no excuse for an unlocked closet, always keep them secured!

2. Unattended housekeeping carts. Room attendant carts that are left unattended for lengthy periods of time are also an open invitation for problems. The purpose of the cart is to store the supplies that a room attendant will need when cleaning a guestroom, so the employee will not need to walk to the housekeeping closet. However, safety procedures dictate that the door to the guestroom should be locked and secured while the attendant is inside (unless a guest is present). Carts should be pulled directly in front of the guestroom door and not placed in the middle of the hallway where these would pose an obstruction. Room attendants must not leave cleaning chemicals within reach of young children nor should they leave room keys or rooming lists that contain guest names on tops of the carts. Consider investing in carts that have a fold down cover to shield amenity items from "walking away". When a room attendant takes an authorized work break, the cart must be secured in the housekeeping closet and not left unattended on the guest floor.



3. Overloaded housekeeping carts. While a room attendant's cart was meant to facilitate their work efficiency, it was not intended to hold all the linens and supplies for an eight



hour shift. Yet, it seems that some attendants may not realize this, as evidenced by the linens or other supplies often stacked several feet above the top of the cart. Overstacked carts pose a safety hazard to both employees and guests from falling objects, are heavier and more difficult to maneuver thus likely resulting in scuffed and gouged walls, and again are an invitation to guests helping themselves to extra linens as they walk by. Room attendants or housemen should restock their carts on a periodic basis each day.



- 4. Linens on guest floors.** Bed and bath linens left laying in piles in the corridor are unsightly and a possible tripping hazard. This also sends the wrong message to guests who might be walking by. Used linens should be placed in the linen bag at the front of the housekeeping cart. Linen bags should be emptied periodically by housemen and transported to the on-premise laundry or staging area for pick-up.



- 5. Using linens as rags.** I continue to see room attendants who use dirty bath linens to clean or wipe down the bathroom fixtures or to dust the guestroom. This is absolutely wrong and will diminish the use life of the terry. It will also startle hotel guests if they see this. Room attendants must have separate sets of rags for cleaning glass, dusting, general cleaning, and disinfecting. After all, they are using four different cleaning chemicals. To avoid cross-contamination with guest linens, housekeeping rags should be a different color than guest linens. Use a different color rag for each task category. This will help the room attendant use only the correct rag for the right cleaning task and will help supervisors spot when attendants are not correctly following procedure.
- 6. Improper door stops.** Again, many room attendants opt to use clothes hangers or guestroom linens as impromptu doorstops so they may access their cart. Using a hanger will damage the doorframe and scratch the door and hanger. Linens can also be damaged or stained with this practice. It also sends an image about lack of professionalism and sophistication on the part of the room attendant. Issue to attendants rubber wedge door stops or bean bags with a door handle tether to prop guestroom doors open. Vegas Doorstops™ manufactures a portable commercial doorstop designed to slip over a guestroom door's middle hinge. Designed to eliminate the need to bend over and retrieve from the floor, this revolutionary doorstop can be mounted on the housekeeping cart when not being used.
- 7. Unvacuumed hallways.** I have noticed in recent years a decrease in the regularity that housekeepers are vacuuming their guestrooms and halls. Not sure why this is the case but it is obvious to any passerby who is a stayover guest. Any light colored debris will be visible to guests as most hall carpets are intentionally dark colors intended to hide stains. While the dark color carpet also hides the dust and dirt, it does not hide anything that is light colored. There is no excuse for failing to vacuum common areas on a daily basis. In fact, daily vacuuming is perhaps the one best thing you can do to extend the service life of your carpets. Dirt that is left imbedded in the carpet fibers will break down the carpet in a much shorter period of time.
- 8. Rooms service trays.** While retrieving room service trays should be the primary responsibility of the In-Room Dining department, guests will not stop to think about this. Plain and simple, food trays and tables left sitting in the hallway are unappealing, a tripping hazard, and an invitation for vermin and rodents. The longer a tray, table or any room service item remains in the guest hallway, the greater the potential for something bad to happen. Equally significant is the negative message it sends to guests about the unresponsiveness of the hotel's employees. Every room attendant, houseman, security officer and engineer should be trained and expected to remove any room service items or debris out of guests' sight to the service elevator landing.
- 9. Full trash receptacles.** Perhaps nothing is quite as visibly unappealing as a full trash can or cigarette urn. A hotel that fails to monitor and empty these receptacles on a regular basis will hear negative comments from guests and experience decrease in demand. Guests do not commend a hotel for emptying these receptacles - they just expect that this will happen. But if you don't empty them, guest will remember this very negative picture and opt not to return to what they perceive as a dirty hotel. Remember that hotel cleanliness is one of the two most important expectations of both male and female guests.
- 10. Blocked or dirty stairwells.** As a cost saving measure, some hotels choose not to clean or even repaint their stairwells on a frequent basis. One of the things that I have learned in my 20 years in the lodging industry is that there is a direct correlation between the overall cleanliness of a hotel and the cleanliness of its stairwells. Prudent hotel managers will realize that even emergency stairwells will be visited by guests traveling short distances between floors. Stairwells that are poorly lit and maintained send a message of concern to guests. Those that contain dirt, cigarette butts, trash or large debris that inhibit passage between floors will make a guest think twice. And remember, because stairwells will be used in an emergency instead of elevators, they can never be used as a location to store furniture or other large items.



11. Credenza and table items. It is unfortunate but most hotels must be wary of placing vases, candlesticks, bowls or other portable decorative items atop credenzas, sideboards, or tables on located guest floors. The portability of these items makes them easy to be stolen, or to be used as weapons if an altercation were to break out on a secluded guest floor. They also pose an attractive nuisance to young children who may try to play with them and damage them. If you do choose to place these items on guest floors, consider finding a way to affix them to the table so they can't be easily removed.



12. Ice machine areas. Failure to properly maintain an ice machine area on a guest floor can have dire consequences. For obvious reasons, ice machines are never placed on carpeted surfaces; they are always located on tiled floors. The problem is that guests often spill ice cubes when filling their ice buckets. The loose ice cubes fall to the tiled floor in front of the ice machine and melt, leaving a puddle of water. The next guest comes along and experiences a slip and fall accident when they step on the puddle or cubes. To alleviate this problem, hotels should place non-slip mats that can absorb moisture in front of each ice machine. Don't forget to post "wet floor" warning signs near each ice machine alcove.



Now that you have reviewed the list, do a walkthrough of your hotel's guest floors. How many of these "errors" does your staff commit? Like Jesse Denton reminds us, "Behavior ignored is behavior accepted!" ✧

(Dr. William D. Frye is an associate professor of hotel management at Niagara University, a former resort general, and co-author of the textbook Managing Housekeeping Operations. The book is available from the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute website: www.ahlei.com. E-mail: wfrye@roomschronicle.com)