



# Energy

by Phil Sprague

## Bilingual communication issues can result in wasted energy

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

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The United States has developed an extremely dynamic population made up of many different nationalities. The Spanish population has become the second largest group in America. Statistics also show that Spanish is the second most common language spoken in America. We have all noticed that Spanish-speaking adults now make up a substantial portion of our workforce. The hotel industry employs a significant number of Spanish-speaking workers in all of the departments throughout the hotel. This is common in almost all size cities today.

Spanish-speaking employees pose a unique problem in the hotel business since most of the training manuals, bulletin board material and signage in the hotel is in English. The communication gap can result in situations where a significant amount of energy is wasted due to misunderstandings, ineffective communications, or even general lack of understanding. In a typical lodging property, the three key departments affected greatest by this issue are housekeeping, laundry and kitchen. The engineering department also is susceptible to this problem, but not as seriously.

The housekeeping department is the most susceptible department in terms of bilingual issues. Housekeepers literally visit every room of the hotel on a daily basis and have the responsibility for taking corrective action and reporting any problems that may be observed. There are specific procedures the housekeepers must follow to provide a quality product, while conserving energy. The temperature setting on thermostats is the most common problem noticed. Spanish-speaking employees typically think in terms of Centigrade, rather than Fahrenheit. This can cause difficulty for them in setting thermostats to the proper temperature during heating and/or cooling seasons. Issuing each room attendant a simple placard with a sketch showing a typical guestroom thermostat setting can easily resolve this problem and overcome any bilingual issues. Housekeepers are also obviously responsible for turning off all lights and appliances, and closing draperies after cleaning the room. They also should report any potential plumbing problems that are noticed while cleaning the room. Without proper training in English, these issues will prevail on an ongoing basis.

The hotel kitchen is another area where bilingual issues can have an effect on efficient energy use. Proper temperature settings and preheat time periods for kitchen cooking equipment are extremely important. Proper thermostat settings for walk-in and reach-in coolers and freezers are critical to eliminate premature spoiling of foodstuffs and to minimize excessive cooling costs.

The last key area of a hotel where bilingual issues are almost always a common problem is the on-premise laundry. Washing, drying and ironing must be done properly to maintain the quality, comfort and use-life of the washed linens and to conserve energy, water, and other chemicals. An established and adhered to plan for preventative maintenance for laundry equipment is an essential component of any good on-premise laundry operation.

As a result of conducting frequent energy audits in hotels, PSA Energy Consultants has learned firsthand about the various difficulties of communicating ideal energy saving practices to hotel staff members. For our readers' benefit, PSA Energy Consultants and *The Rooms Chronicle* is providing a very functional set of energy checklists for the hotel's kitchen, laundry and house-keeping departments. Please feel free to duplicate these

### The Complaint Corner

- Ms. Harriedmother: (...speaking to a front desk clerk at check-in...) As we indicated on our online reservation, we will need a crib for our baby. Can you have one sent to our guestroom?
- Bad Reply: We gave out our last crib an hour ago. Cribs are strictly available on a first come-first serve basis. I guess you are out of luck.
- Slightly Better: I am sorry, but we have no more cribs. Will a rollaway do? Or perhaps you will settle for extra sheets and blankets for the baby?
- Best Reply: I do see your request for a crib Ms. Harriedmother. Since we used our last crib an hour ago I have sent our van driver to our sister hotel to borrow one so you will be all set. He should arrive any minute and I will have the crib and bedding brought immediately to your guestroom.

checklists and post them throughout the hotel. These checklists can also provide an interesting subject for staff meetings, 10-minute training sessions, and shift change and morning line-up briefings. ✧

*(Phil Sprague is a member of the AHLEA Executive Engineers Committee and president of PSA Hotel Energy Consultants. Based in Minneapolis, PSA Hotel Energy Consultants assists lodging companies and individual properties to develop effective, cost-saving energy strategies by auditing and assessing all energy consuming devices and appliances, and delivering comprehensive, customized recommendations in an actionable format. They can be reached at 952-472-6900.)*

