



Risk Management

by Raymond C. Ellis, Jr.

The start of the year is time to complete a thorough walk-through inspection

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As we prepare to enter the year 2010, it is time to do a thorough review of procedures and conditions throughout the property. The first step is to establish an inspection and evaluation team. The general manager should be accompanied by the chief engineer, the executive housekeeper, and the security director on an inspection throughout the entire property. When inspecting food & beverage facilities, include the executive chef and director of food & beverage services as members of the inspection team. Here are the most vital areas to be visited.

Front desk

The front desk is usually preferred as the emergency response coordination center for the property. A master file of all Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) should be maintained in current status at the front desk and should be available for first responders. Copies of these MSDS sheets should also be located in an area where all employees have 24-hour access to review them, such as the employee break room.

A roster of in-house disabled guests should be maintained at the front desk so they can be immediately furnished to police, fire, or other emergency personnel to expedite a rescue mission. The room number and location, the name of the disabled guest, and the nature of the disability should be recorded on the roster.

A file or manual for the Manager on Duty (MOD) should also be readily available. The manual should include instructions on how to close down incoming water, gas, oil, electric, steam or other power sources. Separate laminated instruction cards should be available for the front desk staff for each utility as more than one individual may be required if multiple sources should need to be disconnected. The MOD or Security Director should always coordinate the front desk emergency control function if the general manager is not on the premises at the time of an incident. Also review that the hotel's "telephone tree" is updated to reflect any staff changes.

Hotel lobby

For full-service hotels, is the issue of a receipt for luggage and other items checked by guests rigidly enforced? When a large group check-out is anticipated, are the checked items secured or left scattered and unattended in the lobby? Frequently, hotels use stanchions and cords to convert a section of the lobby as a temporary storage area. But bell staff or security personnel must be assigned to monitor the area and ensure orderly return of the items only to those individuals who surrender a matching claim check.

Is a readily accessible "spill clean-up kit" located in the lobby area? This response kit should contain floor mats, brush and dust pan, mops and pails, granulated absorbent, and warning signs for use in cleaning spills or moisture from foot traffic brought into the lobby during inclement weather. It is recommended that the hotel maintain a "cleaning log" to confirm dates and



times of mopping and other special clean-up actions. This will help the hotel mount an affirmative defense if it is sued in a slip, trip or fall incident.

Hotel entrances

Doorpersons should be assigned the responsibility for controlling the traffic of arriving and departing vehicles and the general upkeep and safety of hotel entrance ways. Bell staff and parking valets should take their direction from doorpersons when serving guests in these entrances. If the valet parking service is contracted to a third party, the valet supervisor should coordinate with the head doorperson. A word of caution though for hotels who contract out valet services, instructions to the valets should be given through their supervisor or team leader and not directly by personnel employed directly by the hotel. If a hotel employee was to give instructions and the contract valet employee was injured in the performance of these instructions, then the hotel itself becomes liable for a Workers Compensation claim instead of the valet company.

What is the condition of roadways, parking lots, and walkway surfaces adjacent to the hotel property or any land that the hotel controls or owns? Is there a program in place for maintaining such surfaces in icy, snowy or rainy conditions? Is there a regular maintenance program in place to fill potholes and correct other surface breaks? Are painted lines and instructions on these roadway and walkways maintained and easily visible? Where practical, use universal symbols and pictographs throughout the premises.

Mechanical and life-safety systems

Before implementing the inspection tour, review deferred maintenance with the chief engineer. While on tour check the condition of the deferred maintenance items. Are there rust marks near any building elements such as windows and balconies, stairways, entrances, flag poles, and other decorative features? What is the condition of any temporary installations? Is it time to provide permanent correction of the problem?

What is the status of regular maintenance programs? Consider the following items:

- Smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, sprinklers. Does the hotel have a supply of replacement sprinkler heads in inventory?
- Is there annual professional calibration of all mechanical and life-safety systems in house?
- Has there been a recent infrared scan (infrared thermogram) of the hotel's electrical system? Infrared thermography can quickly and accurately pinpoint hot spots in electrical systems. This preventative measure can reduce maintenance time and increase profits, reduce unscheduled outages and losses, and cut electricity costs by boosting energy efficiency.
- Pumps, fans, vents, filters, plenums, stacks. Are they clean, unobstructed, and operating efficiently?
- Security alarm systems. Do they transmit alarm signals in a timely and correct manner or do they emit false alarms?
- Portable fire extinguishers. Are they hydrostatically tested and has annual service been performed? Verify compliance dates.
- Elevator, escalator or moving walks. Has regular maintenance been performed and recorded? Are their current operating permits on file?
- Roofs. The maintenance of commercial roofing is tricky as there are warranty implications that must be considered. It is recommended that all transactions on roof installation and maintenance be in formal meeting format with minutes, roster of those in attendance and confirmation of all future procedures. Remember, if the hotel has any installations or maintenance on the roof that is not controlled by the roofer, the warranty is void and the roofer will not provide relief under warranty.

Guestrooms

When inspecting guestrooms, verify lights and TVs are off with one light on as "pilot" inside the entry hall. You will have limited ability to observe the activities of the room attendants, so most of these actions must be confirmed through questioning of the employee.

Add to the list of room attendant responsibilities for them to check the viewport in every room cleaned every day. If the attendant can see into the room from the corridor, it should be immediately reported for Engineering to reverse the unit.

All drinking glasses and cups should be cleaned in the dishwasher and replaced back into guestrooms unless secured with a paper or plastic protector indicating non-use by the prior guest. Under no circumstances should glasses or cups be washed in the guestroom sink by the attendant.

Hoteliers should consider the benefits of utilizing two-attendant teams to service guestrooms. The complaint that room attendants would be talking and not providing service is erroneous as the assigned par can be checked by the supervisor. If the

rooms pass inspection then the conversation is not really a problem. There has been recent OSHA action under CALOSH (California administers its program under contract with federal OSHA), where an employee had arm and back strain relating to triple-sheeting and other physical challenges in preparing a bed with multiple coverlets, and pillows. Team action could protect against such a complaint under OSHA.

Randomly check the room attendant's knowledge on emergency evacuation procedures, HAZCOM, and bloodborne pathogen procedures.

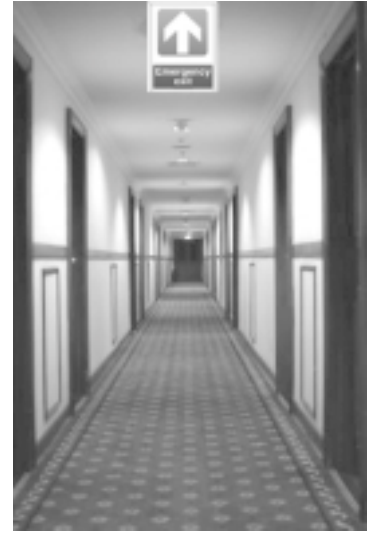
Emergency exits

As you move from floor to floor during the inspection, use the stairway. Is the stairway clear of items that block passage? Remember, emergency evacuation does not focus on the exit door only. The "way of exit" includes all corridors and stairways, as well as passage within a meeting room, exhibit area, or other public spaces. Be aware of any temporary installation or equipment blocking the "way of exit." Verify that a meeting space does not have a platform or screen blocking one of the exits from the function room.

Every emergency exit must have an illuminated emergency exit sign that is easily visible.

Ensure that the sign is illuminated and that it is not blocked from view on any of the approaches to it.

Take special notice of signage to doors and storage rooms. Will it assist or confuse the guest or the public? Pay special attention to proper signage (or lack of signage) on doors that could be mistaken as an exit. Ensure that all entrances and exits are properly marked to avoid confusion: Not an Exit, Linen Room, Fan Room, etc.



Flooring

Throughout the tour, pay special attention to flooring conditions. Are there spills, dropped items, broken tiles, torn carpeting, or an unmarked area where there is a change in floor level? Insist there be a change in color where area carpeting continues onto a staircase. In fire stairwells, yellow stripe the top and bottom step of each flight of steps to warn about a change in levels. Are railings maintained and regularly cleaned? It is suggested the railings be in a light color as an individual is more likely to use a clean hand rail with lighter color.

Are there intersections of passageways in heavy traffic areas that should have a concave mirror at ceiling level to show approaching persons or wheeled equipment? Are all employees instructed to only push and never pull wheeled equipment?

Food & beverage areas

Special considerations in food and beverage areas:

- Verify floor cleaning and a, "Drop it, Pick it up," "Spill it, Wipe it up." policy.
- Use all machine guards and interlocks on meat saws, grinders, mixers, toasters, and steamers.
- Provide knife storage. Keep knives sharpened. Never place knives on a flat surface where it could be accidentally covered. Do not put knives in soapy water where it could be inadvertently picked up. Never grab for a dropped knife; step back and let it fall instead.
- Plan food preparation to minimize opening or entering refrigerator or freezer units.
- Does the kitchen have a preparation schedule that minimizes unnecessary traffic in movement of product in and out of storage, in and out of preparation, and delivery to the guest in the most efficient manner?
- Is there a traffic pattern that will avoid collision and permit easy and efficient movement of kitchen and dining room staff?
- Review records in support of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) protocol to provide procedures that will ensure safe food handling at all stages from receiving to serving of finished product.

- Maintain proper temperatures to provide safe food. In 2005 the FDA changed the upper temperature to 135 degrees F as compared with the prior 140 degrees F. The lower temperature remains at 41 degrees F. Some states have not accepted the 135 degrees F, so verify your state's requirements.
- Are hoods and filters being maintained with minimal grease accumulation? One method is to run the filters through the last run of the dishwasher each night.
- Are there ABC dry chemical portable fire extinguishers available to supplement the hood system? Are employees trained in the use of these extinguishers? When a portable unit is used to avoid a hood dump, is there a procedure for reporting the incident so the extinguisher can be serviced? If not, there could be a time when an extinguisher would be empty when needed in an emergency.

Conclusion

Conducting walk-through inspections of the entire lodging property is a good operational practice. This procedure permits "fresh eyes" to review both guest-contact and support areas as well as mechanical and life-safety systems by individuals that do not pass through these areas on a daily basis. It also holds these respective departments accountable to the collective management team of the hotel. Peer review is always a good means to motivate higher performance.

While walk-through inspections can be conducted anytime, and certainly on a more frequent interval than annually, the typical slower season associated with the start of the new calendar year is an ideal time to be thorough and initiate new positive practices. ✧

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