



Front Office

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What to do if you receive counterfeit money

*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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From a criminal's perspective hotels are an ideal venue for passing off counterfeit currency. As a convenience for hotel guests and others patrons, many front desks gladly exchange large currency notes for smaller ones, often without checking identification or occupant status of the note passer. So often front desk clerks are preoccupied with ensuring guest satisfaction that they fail to think twice about whether the person asking to exchange larger denomination notes for smaller denomination bills might actually be engaging in an illegal act.

Even more confusing is remembering the names or faces of all hotel occupants. The prudent rule of thumb would be to confirm and record every person's identity who was asking to make change for gratuities or for "walking around" money. But then this would be time consuming, inhospitable, and received very poorly by legitimate hotel guests.

So the best course of action is education. All cashiers should be trained to recognize the various basic and security detail features of their respective currencies. Since these are many, TRC will present these features in upcoming issues, commencing with our November/December '05 edition.

In the meantime, if you or your cashiers receive currency notes that are or suspected of being counterfeit, the United States Secret Service recommends that these steps be followed:

1. Do not return it to the passer.
2. Delay the passer if possible.
3. Observe the passer's description, as well as that of any companions, and the license numbers of any vehicles used.
4. Contact your local police department or United States Secret Service field office. These numbers can be found on the inside front page of your local telephone directory.
5. Write your initials and the date in the white border areas of the suspect note.
6. Limit the handling of the note. Carefully place it in a protective covering, such as an envelope.
7. Surrender the note or coin only to a properly identified police officer or a U.S. Secret Service special agent. ✧

Hot tip

Many counterfeit notes can be detected through the use of a counterfeit detector pen because United States currency is printed on specially treated paper which is difficult for non-treasury sources to obtain. The pen contains an iodine solution that reacts with the starch in wood-based (non-currency) paper to create a black stain. When the solution is applied to the special fiber-based paper used in real currency notes, no discoloration occurs. While these pens, which retail for under five dollars each, do nothing but detect bills printed on normal copier paper instead of the fine papers used by the U.S. Treasury, they can serve as a first line of defense against receiving counterfeit notes.