



## Ask Gail

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

# Questions about handling Do-Not-Disturb sign situations

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](mailto:editor@roomschronicle.com)

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Dear Gail:

I wanted to ask *The Rooms Chronicle* and other hoteliers a question about rooms marked “Do Not Disturb.” If such a sign remains on the door all day in the case of a stay, what do you do? Do you respect that and not give any service? Do you save that room to do last assuming that the guests were sleeping late? Or is there other action taken? We have run into a few conflicts over this issue and wonder how most hotels handle this matter.

Marilyn F.  
Williamstown, MA

Dear Marilyn,

Assuming that the guest has already paid for or made provision to pay for the guestroom, hotel law mandates that guests are entitled to a certain degree of privacy as a condition of their peaceful occupancy, at least until the check out time of the indicated date of departure. This means that Do-Not-Disturb (DND) signs should be honored to the extent that it is feasible to do so. However, once the checkout time lapses on the departure date, the guest's right of privacy ceases and hotel personnel may enter the room.

Typically, guests will hang a DND sign on their guestroom door to ensure privacy and to keep the housekeeper from knocking on the door or entering to clean the guestroom. It is not unusual for guests to hang a DND disturb sign when they step out of the guestroom if they wish to keep hotel personnel out of their room. This may be because the guest is an unusually private person, or perhaps has brought expensive or unusual/prohibited personal property into the hotel (e.g., pets, cases of beer, illegal drugs, cooking utensils, undeclared stayover guests and their belongings, etc.). This may also be because the guest occupies the room in an unsanitary or unkempt manner, or because they have damaged furnishings inside the guestroom.

Regardless, without specific knowledge of any of these aforementioned situations, or other “just cause”, a hotelier is generally precluded from entering a DND room without the permission or invitation of the registered guest, unless the hotel has published and uniformly enacted a house policy permitting them to do so. Keep in mind that hotels have the right to institute and enforce “house rules” as they see fit, as long as such rules do not discriminate against protected classes of individuals (i.e., race, religion, gender, national origin, creed, etc.) as specified by federal, state, or local laws. To avoid claims of unfairness or non-applicability, house rules should be conspicuously posted and/or distributed to all guests at check-in and applicable to and enforced uniformly among all guests. I strongly suggest conspicuously posting the check-in time, check-out time and DND policy on the back of every guestroom door to avoid any misunderstanding.

By creating a house rule about DND signs and guest privacy, the prudent hotel manager can alleviate their consternation by posting notices that DND signs will be honored for a maximum of 24 hours before a hotel manager will enter a guestroom. Many hotels have instituted house rules that state that DND signs will be honored only until 3:00pm each afternoon. Other hotels require that a housekeeper or housekeeping manager enter each guestroom once each day to verify that the room, its furnishings and mechanical equipment are intact, to empty the trash, and to replace soiled linens. This allows the hotelier to cite hygiene and maintenance reasons as the impetus for making such entrance.

Having such a policy as this is important because it is not implausible that a guest may decrease in their sleep, slip and fall in the bathtub and become unconscious, or become the unfortunate victim of a guestroom invasion. There have been previous cases where guests have been deceased or victims of crime in their guestroom for unusually long periods before they were found. Additionally, scheming guests seeking to skip out on paying their hotel bill may choose to hang a DND sign in order to buy more time and distance as they flee the hotel. Hence, it is essential that hoteliers maintain control over their property by implementing a comprehensive plan to visit every guestroom each day. The key is to communicate this house policy in a cordial, friendly and positive manner. ✧

(Dr. William D. Frye is an associate professor of hotel management at Niagara University and a former resort general manager and hotel night manager. E-mail: [wfrye@roomschronicle.com](mailto:wfrye@roomschronicle.com).)

