



Ask Gail

by Aleta A. Nitschke, CHA

Determining the cause and source of small hairs on bed linens

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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Dear Gail,

We recently went through an inspection and we had a lot of small hairs found on about ten beds. On each bed it would be 2-3 small, eyelash size hairs, some longer. We use white linens on our beds, including the duvet cover. We have increased our fabric softener and we have dryer tablets installed. I am communicating with my staff not to throw their duvets and pillows on the floor while changing the bed linens. Do you have any suggestions on how to prevent these hairs from reappearing?

Vera Harris
Executive Housekeeper
Minneapolis, MN

Dear Vera,

You didn't mention how many rooms were inspected in total. We are wondering if this hair problem was rampant throughout the hotel or in a particular area. Here are a few thoughts that may help you resolve the mystery of the hairs on the sheets.

1. You actually could have the small hairs analyzed to understand whether they are human hair or inanimate fibers. Ask any high school or college science teacher in your town to have a look under a microscope. Human hair is quite distinctive and can be easily identified. Knowing the type of "hair" will help in tracking down the source. In addition, you can review your operating procedures as follows:
2. Pick a point in the linen-use cycle to begin your investigation. For instance, start with the ironer. Inspect the clean sheets as they are being ironed. Are the hairs present at this point?
3. If the hairs are seen when the sheets are being ironed, backtrack your way through the laundry process.
4. Start with the ironer pads. When were they last cleaned? Are the sheets permitted to drag on the floor at any point while being put through the machine? Is there a mat on the floor that could be transferring hairs?
5. How are the sheets moving from the dryer to the ironer? Is there any chance the hairs are picked up in transit?
6. Check the dryer procedures. Are they being properly loaded? Too many sheets per load will limit the amount of tumbling each can do. Are the lint filters being cleaned properly? Standard procedures call for filters to be cleaned between each load or at minimum twice per day. Are guestroom sheets being dried with any other items that might carry the hairs, (i.e. pet linens, bath linens)? How are the sheets being moved between the dryer and the washer?
7. Check the washing procedures. Again, are the machines being properly loaded? Overloading the washer will prevent the necessary washing action. It is not recommended that the fabric softener be increased over normal amounts. Too much softener will eventually grey out the white linen. If the hairs exist on the sheets before they are placed in the washer, continue backtracking.
8. How is the dirty linen transported from the guestroom to the laundry?
9. How are the room attendants stripping the beds? Do the dirty linens go on the floor where they may pick up carpet fibers or pet hair or other debris? You mention that you are emphasizing to your room attendants to keep the sheets off the carpet. But, with the luxury bed linens now being utilized by most chains, heavy duvets are part of the scheme. Even if



your room attendants make every effort to keep the duvets off the carpet, guests push them onto the floor quite regularly. Could the hairs be transferring from the carpet to the duvet to the sheets?

- 10. Are you using blankets? How often are they laundered and how are they handled during the bed making process?*
- 11. Check several clean/ready rooms as you did with your audit inspection. Are the hairs found on clean sheets in only certain sections of the hotel or throughout?*
- 12. Check some clean sheets on the room attendant's cart. Are the hairs present before the sheets have been carried into the room?*

As you analyze your operation, it will hopefully become clear where the hairs/fibers are being introduced. Once noted, you can take action to eliminate the problem. For instance, perhaps the vacuum cleaners should be reviewed, or the frequency of vacuuming guestrooms. Or perhaps quilt stand/benches could be introduced to provide a place for the duvets. Or perhaps it is as simple as one room attendant having a messy hairdo.

I'm sure it's very frustrating and time consuming, and a real potential for guest complaints. To truly determine the source and cause of these hairs will require some methodical detective work at your end. Good luck! ✧

(Aleta A. Nitschke, CHA, is the founder and publisher emeritus of The Rooms Chronicle® and the former corporate director of rooms for Radisson Hotels. Thanks also to Jenny Botero of Marriott Corporation and Mary Friedman, veteran TRCSM author, for their comments on this problem. As manager of TRC's website Aleta fields specific inquiries pertaining to all facets of hotel operations that are posed by TRCSM website viewers. Readers may submit questions to Ask Gail by visiting the TRCSM website and clicking www.roomschronicle.com)