



Risk Management

by Jesse Denton

Housekeeping employees must be wary of potentially hazardous drug exposure

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Hoteliers must guard against hazardous drug exposure. Not the illegal kind of drugs, but the pharmaceutical type that may be left behind by guests and discovered by housekeeping associates. OSHA has identified this as a problem of increasing exposure to good health.

Employees of the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries have been identified by OSHA as being especially at risk and have demonstrated increasing health concerns. Preparation, administration, manufacturing, and disposal of hazardous medications may expose hundreds of thousands of workers. These hazardous medications are capable of causing serious effects including cancer, organ toxicity, fertility problems, genetic damage, and birth defects.



Although worker exposure to hazardous drugs has been principally in healthcare facilities and the pharmaceutical industry, hotel housekeeping personnel are likely to encounter these drugs in guestrooms and restroom that have been left behind by guests and customers. Although these are incidental encounters, increased exposure could potentially threaten the health of certain associates, particularly females of child bearing age or those individuals with weakened immune systems. Some drugs for the treatment of male illnesses or cancer bear the warning “It should also be noted that women, particularly women of child bearing age, should avoid all contact with these drugs (even touching them)...”



It may be prudent to take the same approach with pharmaceuticals discovered in guestrooms and restrooms, as with “sharps”, and encourage only designated responders to handle the pharmaceuticals, and then only when using personal protective equipment. The Food & Drug Administration advises to put trash. There are also programs by companies, such as Sharps by Mail, for the return of non-controlled drugs for disposal. medicines in the trash. There are also programs by companies, such as Sharps by Mail, for the return of non-controlled drugs for disposal.

If the discovered pharmaceutical is a controlled substance, contact your local police department or hospital for assistance with disposal. Many drugstores participate in Sharps Compliance Corporations’s TakeAway Environmental Return System™ and will provide assistance to dispose of controlled substances. Disposing of the medicines in this way would help keep associates safe. Incorporating this procedure into your safety program puts your hotel ahead of possible future OSHA requirements. ✧

(Jesse Denton is an independent loss prevention consultant based in Atlanta, GA. He possesses over 40 years of experience, the last 24 years with major hotel and insurance companies in the hospitality industry. Jesse was honored in February 2009 by HospitalityLawyer.com with the Thom Davis Award for hospitality loss prevention. He is available for consultation and may be reached via e-mail at: jldentonjr@bellsouth.net or by phone at 770-257-8363.)

