



# Risk Management

by Jesse Denton

## Managing fire hazards associated with electricity, smoking, and on-premise laundries

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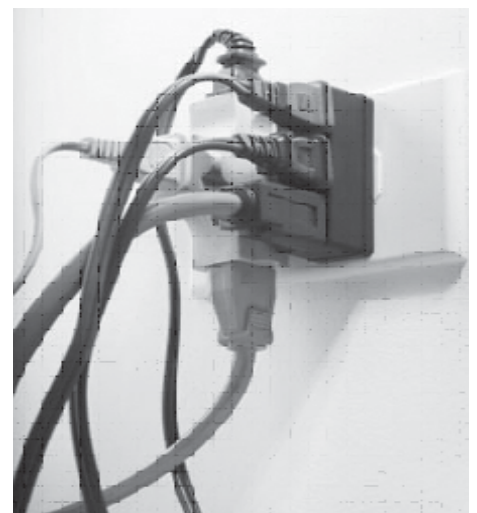
There are many areas in hotels that pose fire hazards. Presenting a comprehensive overview that addresses each potential hazard could fill volumes of pages, as evidenced by the extensive consensus codes and standards developed and published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), which are intended to minimize the possibility and effects of fire. Virtually every building, process, service, design, and installation in society today is affected by these NFPA documents.

For this issue, I have chosen to briefly discuss three areas that hoteliers can significantly minimize the threat of fire within their hotel by implementing some simple steps pertaining to electricity, smokers, and on-premise laundry hazards.

### Electrical threats

- Keep lamps, light fixtures, and light bulbs away from combustibles. A three-foot clearance in storage areas is recommended.
- Discourage or prohibit the use of portable electrical heaters around individual work areas. This includes offices and maintenance shops. Unfortunately, some employees are less than diligent in turning them off before leaving for the day, thus posing a significant fire hazard.
- If you do choose to permit portable electrical heaters, ensure that they have an automatic shut-off safety mechanism so that if the heater is tipped over, it will shut off. Never allow portable heaters to be plugged into extension cords or power strips as they may overload the cord or circuit and initiate an electrical fire.
- Replace cracked and damaged electrical cords. Any electrical cord where the copper wiring is visible is a flash point to initiate a fire.
- Use extension cords for *temporary* wiring only. If it is necessary to frequently use extension cords or power strips, consider having additional circuits or receptacles added by a qualified electrician.
- Do not over load wall receptacle or power strips.
- Call a qualified electrician if you have recurring problems with tripping circuit breakers, discolored or warm wall outlets, or flickering lights.

Pictured below: Overloading wall circuits is a fire hazard. In this situation, the hotel should contact a qualified electrician to install additional outlets into the wall to accommodate the large number of electrical cords.



### Control smokers

- Smoking should be allowed only in areas set aside for that purpose. This area must be kept free of combustibles as well as flammable materials and refuse.

- Provide deep, sturdy ashtrays for these areas. Insist that smoking materials be properly discarded in these ashtrays.
- Keep combustible materials, including combustible mulch and ground cover, away from air intakes and exits for buildings. Keep flammable materials away from buildings with combustible siding.

### **Managing laundry fire hazards**

One in six on-premise laundries, whether it is commercial, industrial, or institutional, reports a fire each year. This numbers totals more than 3000+ laundry fires annually. The National Fire Protection Association cites dryers as a contributing factor in 70 percent of the fires. Spontaneous ignition is behind 5 percent of the fires with the remaining 25 percent of the fire losses being attributed to faulty electrical arrangements, machinery failure, careless smoking, and arson.

The first step in making a hotel's on-premise laundry safer is a general awareness of spontaneous ignition, its danger, causes, process, and controls needed to prevent it. Here are some general tips, reminders, and control points:

- If storage is unavoidable, it should be outside, in covered metal containers and away from other combustibles.
- Most spontaneous ignitions occur in washed and dried cloths containing residual materials, including dust mops, shop towels, solvent-soaked rags, etc.
- All laundry, and especially cleaning rags, must be completely rinsed clean prior to drying.
- Large stacks or piles of laundry must be avoided. Separate them into smaller piles. Should stacking be necessary, linens must be spread to allow for ventilation/cooling.
- Always maintain and utilize laundry equipment to the manufacturer's specifications.
- The cool down portion of the drying cycle must NEVER be shortened or eliminated.
- Always clean the lint traps for every piece of drying equipment at least twice a day. Allowing lint to build up in these traps is asking for a fire to start. Keep discarded lint away from sources of flame such as the burner in a dryer. ✧

*(Jesse Denton is an independent loss prevention consultant based in Atlanta, GA. He possesses over 40 years of experience, the last 22 years with major hotel and insurance companies in the hospitality industry. Jesse was honored in February 2009 by HospitalityLawyer.com with the Hospitality Loss Prevention Lifetime Achievement award. Content for this article was derived from his monthly newsletter Front Line Risk Bulletin. He may be reached via e-mail at: [jldentonjr@bellsouth.net](mailto:jldentonjr@bellsouth.net).)*