

Hazards of Housekeeping

Unmanaged employees

As many hospitality based operations work to balance the workforce with management, one thing to consider is that mismanagement of, or, no management whatsoever will have a direct impact on on-the-job injuries and safety programs. Unmanaged employee injuries will add more cost to workers' comp insurance claims, and higher costs translate into higher insurance rates at renewal time.

One area to pay particular attention to is the housekeeping department. Historically that area is one of the biggest contributors of workers' compensation injuries. With proper controls, many of those injuries could have been prevented.

Housekeeping hazards

On average, housekeepers are asked to clean 15 rooms per day, allowing for 30 minutes per room to complete a task list that usually includes 25+ items. The number of people staying in a room can add stress to the task. Housekeepers who have to rush to complete their rooms, get injured more often.

As an example, one large hotel's signature bed includes 18 components: a 113-pound pillow-top mattress, a mattress topper, three sheets, a down blanket, a down duvet insert and cover, two standard pillows and cases, two king-sized pillows and cases, and a decorative "bolster" pillow and case.

A housekeeper who dresses fifteen of these beds per day will strip over 500 pounds of soiled linen and replace it with 500 pounds of clean linen. The heavy lifting and repetitive motion involved in these tasks can lead to back and shoulder injuries, bursitis of the knee, carpal tunnel syndrome and persistent pain in the hands, wrists and neck.

Managing a hospitality WC program

Hotel workers have a 40% higher injury rate than other service sectors. Sprains/strains account for up-to 40% of housekeeper injuries due to:

- Making a bed (Lifting mattresses, adding sheets, etc.)
- Cleaning showers and mirrors
- Pushing carts weighing more than 300 pounds

Historical data shows that about 80% of all employee injuries occur within the first two years of employment. Training staff to use proper ergonomic techniques can reduce injuries. Below are some areas to consider when working with your staff

- Never try to rotate or flip a mattress on your own, always have someone assist you. When making a bed, consider using a "mattress lifting" device to help eliminate strain.
- Bending over to clean a floor or bath tub. Use a tool with an extension pole to clean standing up.
- Never stand on a tub or toilet to clean. Do not stand on chairs and furniture. Use step stools or ladders.
- Don not overload linen carts or dirty linen bins. Make more trips with smaller loads.
- Check the vacuum and see if it's too heavy.
- Use gloves to protect hands and safety goggles to protect eyes.