



Atlantic City's Dirty Jobs:

Housekeepers call on NJ's largest hotels to follow state daily room cleaning standard



Executive Summary

Mandatory daily room cleaning in hotels is an important policy to promote the highest standard of sanitization, a world class image for New Jersey's tourism industry, and safe working conditions and fair workloads for housekeepers. New Jersey law has required daily room cleaning in hotels since 2020. But some Atlantic City casino hotel housekeepers report that some occupied casino hotel rooms are not being cleaned each day. Not cleaning rooms every day results in heavier workloads for housekeepers as rooms are messier at checkout. Action by the State of New Jersey is needed for the safety of workers and guests and to maintain Atlantic City's image as a premier tourist destination.

Daily room cleaning is the law for New Jersey hotels.

New Jersey's Hotel and Multiple Dwelling Law, N.J.S.A. 55:13A-1, defines "hotels" as any building that contains 10 or more rooms that are advertised or used as sleeping or dwelling accommodations for guests.

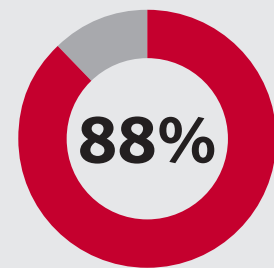
On June 11, 2020, Governor Phil Murphy signed P.L. 2020, c. 37 into law, adding new provisions to the Hotel and Multiple Dwelling Law, including N.J.S.A. 55:13A-30 "Protocols for hotel sanitation." That provision directed the Commissioner of Health to adopt protocols requiring hotels to sanitize hotel guest rooms and public areas, provide adequate cleaning products and training for hotel staff to maximize the sanitary condition of those areas, and maintain minimum staffing levels for hotel front desks. A central requirement of the new sanitization protocols is daily room cleaning:

*"...ensure that every occupied guest room is **cleaned and sanitized every day**, and that the room is provided with an adequate supply of clean towels, sheets, and pillowcases and that the towels, sheets, and pillowcases that are changed no less frequently than once every day..."*

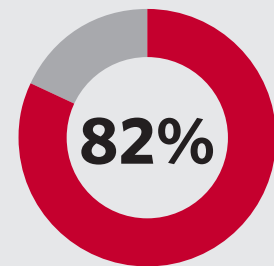
-N.J.S.A. 55:13A-30 Section 2(4) (emphasis added)

This Act is an important public health policy that protects New Jersey hotel workers and guests.

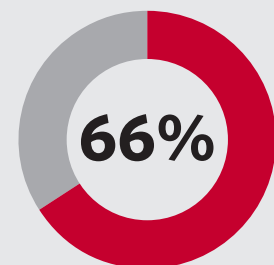
In a 2022 survey by UNITE HERE of 397 Atlantic City casino hotel housekeepers, when rooms hadn't been cleaned for multiple days:



reported that rooms are dirtier at checkout



reported having to work harder



reported feeling more pain from their work

Housekeepers have reported that not all occupied rooms are cleaned each day in some Atlantic City casino hotels.

Atlantic City casino hotels are the largest hotels in the State of New Jersey, with a collective 15,109 guest rooms.¹ Each has far more than 10 rooms per property. Daily room cleaning in Atlantic City casino hotels should therefore be a priority for the State. However, there is not a clear and well publicized procedure for workers and hotel guests to report hotels that are not providing daily room cleaning to the State.

In March and April 2022, UNITE HERE Local 54 conducted a survey of 397 Atlantic City casino hotel housekeepers and in-depth follow-up interviews with 16 participants. This report presents our findings from the survey and interviews.

Two housekeepers at Caesars reported that not all occupied rooms are cleaned every day and that management had instructed them that checkout rooms were the priority, not occupied rooms. One Caesars housekeeper reported:

"...sometimes [the occupied rooms] are without service for 2 to 3 days and when the guests leave, it is more complicated to clean because there is more trash and much more linen... We talked to the manager, and she tells us that since they are short-staffed, the check-out rooms have priority and not the occupied rooms. She told me directly that since there is no personnel, the checkout rooms are the priority."

Two housekeepers at Harrah's also reported that occupied rooms are not always cleaned every day. One explained that:

"At Harrah's, they don't assign every occupied room to be cleaned every day. We begin at nine in the morning, and they give us a list of rooms. We see which ones are the occupied rooms. Sometimes people have been there for two or three days, but we don't clean those rooms. Some days when I come to work, I will get a list of all checkout rooms while occupied rooms are left unassigned."



Sometimes, the guests will ask me, 'Are you going to clean my room today?' That's how we know they are not assigning all of the occupied rooms to be cleaned."

At Golden Nugget, a sign was posted at the front desk as of April 27, 2022, which stated:

"Daily Housekeeping services are unavailable at this time. During your stay, our Housekeeping Team will be available, upon request, to fulfill linen changes and to provide additional towels."

Housekeepers report heavier workloads and more pain when occupied rooms are not cleaned every day.

Reduced room cleaning makes casino hotel housekeepers' work more difficult. Every day is a race against the clock for housekeepers, who are assigned a daily room quota to complete during their shifts. A typical day often includes both "stayover" rooms (also referred to as "occupied" rooms) and "checkouts," which are harder to clean even when rooms have been serviced regularly throughout a guest's stay. A 2016 time-motion study of an all-suite hotel found that checkout rooms took 87 percent longer to clean than stayover rooms.² If hotels are not cleaning stayover rooms daily, it may increase the number of checkout rooms in each housekeeper's daily quota and could make those checkouts dirtier after days without cleaning or disinfection.

When Atlantic City casino hotel housekeepers were asked, "When guest rooms are not cleaned every day, what effect does that have on you when cleaning rooms?"

- 88% reported that the rooms are dirtier at checkout;
- 82% reported having to work harder; and
- 66% reported feeling more pain from working.

They also reported rushing, skipping breaks, and frequent reliance on pain medication.

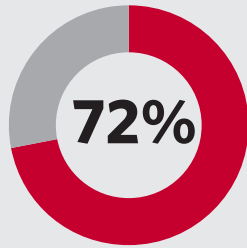
- When asked if in the past year they have ever skipped breaks to complete their room assignment, 72% reported skipping breaks at least once per month.



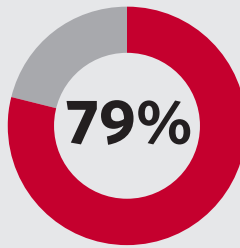
"We clean more check outs each shift with less housekeepers. I'm working 6 days a week with mandatory overtime. Enough is enough! We deserve better.."

—Teresa Lopez, Caesars

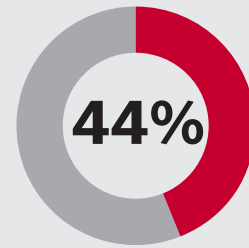
In a 2022 survey by UNITE HERE of 397 Atlantic City casino hotel housekeepers, in the past year:



reported skipping
breaks at least
1x/month



reported taking pain
medicine at least
1x/month



reported taking pain
medicine every day

- When asked if in the past year they have taken medicine for pain caused by their work, 79% reported taking pain medicine at least once per month. 44% reported taking pain medicine every day.

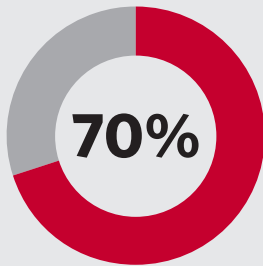
Daily room cleaning is necessary for first-class standards in sanitation, hospitality, and safety

The State of New Jersey has an interest in promoting the highest possible standards for sanitation and cleanliness in hotels to maintain a first-class standard that protects Atlantic City's reputation as a tourist destination.

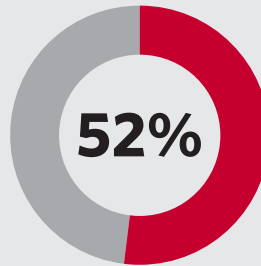
Housekeepers reported that not cleaning rooms everyday results in trash and dirty linen piling up in the rooms and hallways.

- 70% of surveyed housekeepers reported that guests leave trash and linen in the hall when guest rooms are not cleaned every day.
- 52% of housekeepers reported having to use more cleaning chemicals when guest rooms are not cleaned every day.
- 88% of housekeepers reporting seeing what they considered excessive trash in a guest room within the past year.

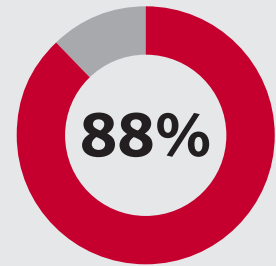
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One housekeeper said:

"There's a lot of trash, a lot more trash and the bathrooms are very dirty. There are people who pile up trash. They pile it up in the bathroom. Other times they take it out into the hallway."

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) has recommended that for pests, including bed bugs, "the best prevention is daily inspection," according to a fact sheet posted on its website as of May 2022.³

When surveyed about safety, customers overwhelmingly report a preference for daily room cleaning. In April 2020, McKinsey surveyed 3,498 travelers from five countries on what made them feel safe while traveling during the COVID pandemic. It showed less than 10 percent of the 1,427 U.S. customers surveyed wanted hotels not to provide housekeeping during their stay.⁴

As the hospitality industry has taken steps to address human trafficking, some employers have implemented programs to train hotel staff to identify and report warning signs. Experts including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking have identified refusal of room cleaning and the constant use of "do not disturb" signs for multiple days as two potential indicators that a hotel is being used for sex trafficking.⁵ If hotels are not providing daily room cleaning or incentivizing guests to decline daily room cleaning, then it could be more difficult to determine when guests are refusing room cleaning for multiple days.



"I have to work harder and rush. I crash into things and fall but I have to go on as if nothing happened."

—Mercedes Cuadros, Caesars

Recommendations

1. The State of New Jersey, including the Department of Health, the Bureau of Housing Inspection, and all other relevant agencies, should enforce the daily room cleaning standard in casino hotels. A clear procedure for reporting a lack of daily room cleaning should be established and publicized widely to casino workers. Workers who report a lack of daily room cleaning should be protected from retaliation.
2. Casino hotel guests should be informed that hotels are required to provide daily room cleaning. They should also be informed how to file a complaint with the State if a hotel operator is not doing so.
3. Casino hotel operators should follow New Jersey's daily room cleaning standard for hotels. Operators should not offer incentives to decline daily room cleaning. They should also take all necessary steps to ensure adequate housekeeping staffing levels to be sure all guest rooms are cleaned daily. Housekeeping starting wages should be raised to promote recruitment and retention of housekeepers.

ENDNOTES

¹ New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement. (2022, April 8). Press Release. <https://www.nj.gov/oag/ge/docs/Financials/QuarterlyFinRpt2021/4thQTR2021PressRelease.pdf>

² Hotel Management. (2016, January 20). Housekeeping best practices to improve productivity.

³ American Hotel and Lodging Association. (n.d.). Bed Bug Fact Sheet. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from <https://www.ahla.com/resources/ahla-bed-bug-fact-sheet>

⁴ Vik Krishnan, Ryan Mann, Nathan Seitzman, and Nina Wittkamp. (2020, June 10). Hospitality and COVID-19: How long until 'no vacancy' for US hotels? McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/travel-logistics-and-infrastructure/our-insights/hospitality-and-covid-19-how-long-until-no-vacancy-for-us-hotels>

⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Blue Campaign Hospitality Toolkit. <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/blue-campaign/toolkits/hospitality-toolkit-eng.pdf>

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Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking (BEST). (2021). Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Tool Kit. https://calodging.com/sites/default/files/inline-documents/BEST_PrintableToolkit.pdf

Vialpando, David. (2022, March 22). Human Trafficking in Casinos: The Ghost Crime Operating in Plain Sight. Security Management. <https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/latest-news/online-exclusives/2022/human-trafficking-in-casinos-the-ghost-crime-operating-in-plain-sight/>

UNITE HERE Local 54 Atlantic City has been representing hospitality workers in the hospitality industry for over 100 years. Our members work as housekeepers, bartenders, cocktail servers, cooks, bellmen, doormen, and other service jobs in the casinos and hospitality industry of South Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. With over 10,000 members, Local 54 is the largest private sector union in the region. Local 54 is an affiliate of UNITE HERE, an international labor union that represents 300,000 working people across North America.

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