



UNIT-10

Security & Emergency Measures

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the duties and obligations of receptionists in emergency situations
- ✓ Take the necessary action when guests break important hotel policies
- ✓ Contribute to a hotel-wide fire safety plan

Unit 10

Security

Not every hotel has a dedicated security department. Irrespective of the size of the establishment, however, all hotels have a variety of security responsibilities to oversee, which include:

- Guest and employee safety;
- Room key security;
- Fire safety systems;
- Bomb threat action;
- Emergency evacuation plans;
- Employee safety training plans;
- Emergency communication plans.

Hotel security is as much about protecting staff members as it is safeguarding the welfare of guests. Unfortunately, it often isn't until something goes wrong that the true value of an effective safety and security framework becomes evident. By which time, it may be too late to do anything about it.

Like every business, hotel businesses are legally obliged to provide safe working environments for employees and safe residence for guests and visitors. Its comparatively rare for dangerous incidents to occur in hotels, but taking a passive approach to safety and security is the biggest mistake any hotel worker can make.

The Security Department

Hotel receptionists (and front office workers in general) serve as the communications centre for the entire establishment. Even in instances where a security department is present, it is likely that the reception will be the first point of contact for anyone reporting an emergency. When this happens, it is the responsibility of the receptionist to decide how to handle the situation and who to refer it to. A decision that often means evaluating the severity of the incident and assessing whether it is a matter for the security department or not. For obvious reasons, speed and urgency are important. Though perhaps not as important as being able to stay calm, cool and collected in even the most stressful and challenging situations.

Where a security department is present, it is often (wrongly) viewed as a passive department. Or to put it another way, that security personnel only spring into action when there is an issue to be addressed. In reality, the security department and all associated personnel must be active and proactive at all times. Key the responsibilities include training staff on safety and security issues, establishing policies, reviewing past performance and continuously evaluating the safety and security of the hotel. It's also the responsibility of the security department (where present) to evaluate the physical safety of the building and the equipment therein.

According to Hotel Security Report, which was written by Patrick M. Murphy, CPP, several priority security areas are as follow:

- **Building entrances**—Periodic inspections should be carried out to ensure that all entrances to the building are sufficiently illuminated and unobstructed. This also means checking that accurate and informative signage is present, along with safe and undamaged surfaces for guests and visitors to walk on.
- **Hotel lobbies**—A key design consideration with all hotel lobbies is eliminating ‘blind spots’. This means ensuring that front desk workers can see every inch of the lobby in its entirety and keep an eye on what’s happening at all times. Again, lobbies should be sufficiently illuminated and free of any obstructions or potential hazards.
- **Guestrooms**—Access to guest rooms is usually provided these days by way of electronic key card systems. Along with being simpler, safer and more convenient than keys, electronic key cards automatically generate a log of who has accessed each room and when.
- **Guest amenities** – It’s just as important to watch over the safety and security of the various amenities around your hotel, as it is your guest rooms, lobbies and so on. This could include exercise rooms, swimming pools, restaurants, meeting rooms and so on - all of which should be regular assessed to ensure their safety and security.
- **Exterior of the property** – The same also applies with all exterior spaces, all of which should be sufficiently illuminated and covered by CCTV where possible. Again, it’s generally advisable to eliminate as many blind spots around the property’s exterior as possible, boosting safety for guests/visitors and generally deterring would-be criminals.
- **Parking** – Car parks are among the most common areas of hotels to be targeted by criminals. Some hotels hire security guards to safeguard their car parks 24/7, while others simply install quality lighting and CCTV systems. However, it’s also not uncommon for hotels to offer ‘unsecured’ parking with little to no coverage of any kind, which guests are invited to use entirely at their own risk. For obvious reasons, this unsecured option isn’t the *preferred* option among guests and can cause some to take their business elsewhere.

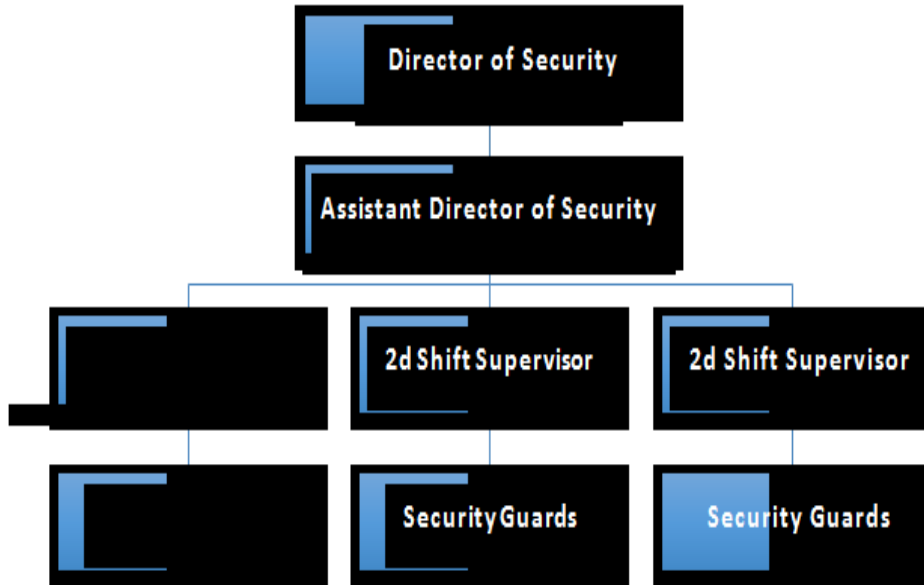


Fig: 10.1 Organization chart for a security department

Organization of a Security Department

Where a security department is present, it is organized in a similar way to most other hotel departments. There will be a director or senior manager at the top of the hierarchy, followed by an assistant manager, one or more supervisors and one or more security guards. It is the director or manager of security that ultimately takes ownership of all important safety and security issues, though it is the security guards (or equivalents) who perform most of the physical security services around the hotel.

Working hours differ significantly from one hotel to the next - some hire security guards to work 24/7, others only use security guards overnight when the risk of most security incidents is assumed to be higher. Interestingly, a sizeable proportion of all hotels worldwide do not hire or deploy specific security staff of any kind at any time. Instead, safety and security procedures are simply shared between other staff members - primarily front desk workers and receptionists.

Hence, the organization chart above refers to the hierarchical structure of the security staff force at a particularly large hotel. The smaller the hotel, the less likely it is that a dedicated security department will be established.

In-House Security Departments Versus Contracted

Security Services

For many hotels, the preferred solution is to work with external security services, rather than hire in-house staff. As with all aspects of outsourcing, there are advantages and

disadvantages to bringing in third party contractors.

One of the biggest advantages of using contracted security services is the fact that you gain immediate access to skilled and experienced security personnel. Rather than having to train new recruits on important security subject and standards, chances are they'll already bring plenty of experience and expertise to the table. Outsourcing can also provide access to invaluable safety and security consultancy, along with the latest technology and security systems your hotel may otherwise not have access to. Of course, outsourcing also eliminates a variety of costs from the equation - paid leave, annual bonuses and the risks associated with absenteeism. Pound for pound, outsourcing has the potential to be significantly more cost effective.

However, this isn't the case in all instances. In the case of a particularly large hotel, the costs of covering *all* safety and security requirements on a 24/7 basis with an external provider could be excessive. In addition, there are some businesses that prefer to hire dedicated security personnel to work exclusively with their hotel. Outsourcing brings the inherent risk of being provided with an inexperienced and unqualified contractor, who may have little to no interest in doing a good job for the benefit of your business. Given the importance of safety and security, these are the kinds of risks that must be taken into account.

Again, therefore, it's up to the individual business to evaluate its preferences, its priorities and its preferred approach to safety and security. And for that matter, whether or not it is necessary to appoint a dedicated security personnel in the first place.

Room Key Security

One of the most important security responsibilities within any hotel is room key security. Hotels can be particularly complex facilities where room key security and general access are concerned. Dozens, perhaps even hundreds of rooms - all of which need to be made accessible exclusively for authorised individuals. From restricted staff areas to the guest rooms themselves, you need to ensure that *only* those who are authorised to do so gain access to any given room.

Hotels worldwide typically use one of two primary lock and key systems for their guests and their staff members. The first of which is the traditional **hard key system**, which involves the use of conventional keys and keyholes. The second is the more advanced **electronic key system**, where conventional keys and locks are replaced by cards and digital door locks. Each of these electronic cards and locks can be programmed and reprogrammed indefinitely, in order to ensure that the key cards you issue can only access the room (or rooms) that the recipient is authorized to access.

In hotels that use electronic key cards, staff members will typically be issued with cards that are identical in appearance to those issued to guests. The difference being that the cards issues to staff members will also grant them access to restricted 'staff-only' areas around the property. All guest key cards and staff key cards can be programmed and reprogrammed to

access any room (or rooms) around the hotel in a matter of seconds. In the event that a key card goes missing or is stolen, it is immediately rendered inoperable by cancelling it on the system and issuing a new key card with a different internal 'code'. This is significantly safer and simpler than operating with physical keys, which call for physical lock changes and can cause severe security issues.

There's also a third room entry system that's proving popular in some markets, which eliminates keys from the picture altogether. Instead of the usual lock and key, the door features a numeric keypad and the customer is provided with a PIN to unlock the door. As this PIN can be issued to the customer by way of email or SMS, there is often no need to check in the conventional way. Interestingly, there are some hotels worldwide using this keypad entry system that do not even have a conventional check-in desk at all.

Fire Safety

Realistically, you cannot expect to remain 100% calm, grounded and logical in the event of a fire. Assuming the incident is in any way severe, the outbreak of a fire has a tendency to instil panic in the vast majority of people. Working in a hotel, however, it is vital that you remember your obligations to the safety and welfare of every guest on your premises at the time. Every hotel will therefore have its own unique fire safety and evacuation policy, which will be created as a collaborative effort between *all* hotel departments. It is your job to ensure you know and understand every aspect of your hotel's fire safety code that is relevant to your position.

Fire Code General Requirements

It is a legal requirement for hotel businesses to follow a variety of rules where fire safety is concerned. These obligations differ significantly from one jurisdiction and business type to the next, though encompass a long list of standard (even common sense) measures that must be taken and policies to be enforced. Examples of which include ensuring fire/smoke detectors are installed and tested on a regular basis, using fire-resistant materials around the hotel where possible, ensuring the building's electronics are in a safe working order and so on. Most importantly, the hotel need to ensure *every* member of staff across *every* department knows exactly what to do in the event of a fire.

Guest Expectations

The guests that choose to stay at your hotel will naturally expect you to safeguard their health and wellbeing. It's not the kind of thing most guests ask about, or even show any direct interest in. Nevertheless, they'll expect you to have already taken their health and safety into account and made it a priority for your business.

These days, most guests don't even bother to check the fire safety and building evacuation information on the back of the door to their room. Nevertheless, it's still your legal obligation to ensure it is both present and accurate. Guests aren't typically inclined to ask questions regarding safety and security, until something goes wrong. At which point, you'll need to ensure you're in a position to address their concerns and answer their questions.

Fire Safety Plan

A fire safety plan is an important all-round document in a business environment. For obvious reasons, it is impossible to document absolutely *everything* there is to say about fire safety. Instead, therefore, it's about focusing on issues of urgency and priority, which can be used by staff members at all levels to improve their knowledge and understanding of general fire safety. Fire safety plans differ significantly from one building to the next, though will almost always include a variety of common sense considerations, such as:

1. Ensuring smoke detectors and alarms have been fitted in every guest room and across all public areas and working spaces across the hotel.
2. Every smoke detector and alarm should be tested on a regular basis and all such tests should be formally documented and recorded.
3. Routine drills should be carried out on a regular basis, in order to ensure every employee knows how to act in the event of a fire.
4. Assembly points should be set up in safe places around the hotel, which should also be clearly indicated in evacuation plans provided for guests and staff members.
5. Making sure hotel workers know which types of smaller fires they can attempt to tackle themselves, along with which fires should prompt them to call the emergency services.
6. Ensuring various different types of fire extinguishers are present around the hotel and tested on a regular basis.
7. Training workers (and recording training sessions) on how to use different types of fire extinguishers when tackling different types of fires.
8. Establishing an emergency communication plan for the front desk and for all other departments within the hotel.

Employee Training in Fire Safety

Fire safety should form a core aspect of employees' initial and ongoing training across the hotel. Contrary to popular belief, health and safety training is far from a one-time-only responsibility. Refresher courses and sessions should be provided on a regular basis - they should be made *mandatory* for all employees across the board. The longer it's been since an employee attended a fire safety session, the less likely they are to remember what they need to do in the event of an emergency.

The basics of employee training in fire safety should extend to where the nearest fire exits are, where fire extinguishers are located, which types of fire extinguishers are suitable for different types of fires, when to call the emergency services, when and how to sound the alarm, how to contribute to a successful building evacuation and so on. Irrespective of the position and the responsibilities of the employee, every hotel worker should be introduced to the basics a fire safety. As you never know where and when an incident will occur, any employee could find themselves dealing with any kind of incident at any time.

Guest Instruction in Fire Safety

Interestingly, it's comparatively rare for guests to be informed by hotel staff about fire safety and general security. You wouldn't let a guest check in without telling them where and when breakfast is served - pointing out the nearest emergency exit, however, is a completely different story. Far from a passive approach to safety and security, this is because all the information needed is (or should be) communicated elsewhere.

Every guest room should contain all the information needed regarding evacuation plans, emergency exits and so on. Guests should also be told that they can contact reception anytime if they have any questions or concerns. Technically speaking, it is the responsibility of the guest to ensure they are familiar with the hotel's emergency and evacuation protocols. All such information will usually be provided in a concise matter on the back of their door, which they may or may not choose to study during their stay.

When it comes to smoke detectors, fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fire safety doors, fire retardant materials and so on, these are all the kinds of things today's guest simply *expects* your hotel to have. Primarily for the reason that you are required to have them by law.

Emergency Communication

Quality communication can make the difference between a major incident that's handled without issue and a minor incident that becomes a major disaster. Again, it's a case of ensuring that each and every worker within the hotel understands their obligations, in the event of an emergency.

Setting up an emergency communication plan is essentially all about establishing a **communication hierarchy**. Roughly translated, establishing a certain amount of accountability in the event of an emergency - who tells who, when they tell them and so on. The problem being that far too many hotel workers simply ignore dangerous situations when they encounter them, assuming 'someone else' will report them and/or handle them. If everyone did the same, nothing would happen...and the situation would get much worse.

Developing the Emergency Communication Plan

Along with establishing a communication hierarchy, your hotel's communication plan will also provide fast-access contact information for relevant emergency services, utility companies and so on. Obvious examples of which include the police department, fire department, gas company and local government offices. Your communication plan should also feature the emergency contact details of the general manager of the hotel, each department manager and your security manager (if appointed).

The importance of communication should be discussed in-depth during employee health and safety training programs. Copies of the emergency communication plan should always be within reach, along with any other important materials that may be necessary in the event of an emergency. One example of which being a complete record of the day's total hotel

occupancy, in order to ensure everybody is accounted for.

Employee Safety Training

Every hospitality business operates in the face of any number of risks on a daily basis. Even in a comparatively quiet and relaxing hotel environment, anything can happen at any time. It may be cliché to say that all workers should therefore ‘expect the unexpected’, but it’s a pretty accurate and appropriate mantra to work by.

Think of it this way - you (and your fellow employees) will probably do your level best to keep things safe and secure. However, add dozens (or even hundreds) of complete strangers (your guests) into the mix and the whole thing suddenly becomes more dynamic and less predictable. You know your hotel inside and out, so you’re unlikely to spark a dangerous incident. For your guests, it’s an unfamiliar property they may not treat with the same care and respect as their own home.

Of course, the complete list of accidents and dangerous incidents that can occur in a hospitality environment is endless. In a well-managed and proactive hotel environment, it’s comparatively rare for any genuine incident of severity and relevance to occur. Nevertheless, as there’s no way of knowing what’s around the corner, you need to be ready for anything.

As a result, you will probably find that your initial and ongoing training focuses heavily on the more likely eventualities, and those with more severe consequences. The more *unlikely* the incident and the lower its potential to harm your hotel and its occupants, the less you need to worry about it.

Here are some of the potential incidents and emergencies you may find yourself dealing with as a hotel receptionist:

A guest arrives with a booking confirmation, but no booking in your system:

- First of all, understand that while this may not be an ‘emergency’ to you, it could be a very big deal with big implications for the guest.
- Don’t panic or express too much initial concern, before taking the time to investigate the issue. Doing so will only worry and anger the guest.
- If it’s going to take some time to sort out, ask the guest to take a seat, close your desk and give it your full priority.
- Should there be no suitable rooms available at your hotel, begin the out-booking process in accordance with your hotel’s policies.
- Apologise to the guest and empathise with their situation, without taking direct responsibility or blaming the agent who took the reservation.
- If the guest is irate, explain calmly and politely that you understand their frustrations, but there is simply nothing you can do as your rooms are already occupied.

- If authorized to do so, consider offering the guest an incentive (free stay, discount voucher) for a future stay to keep them sweet.

Guest screaming at you:

- Stay calm, focused and objective - never scream back at them.
- If you feel intimidated or uncomfortable, tell the guest you are not willing to continue the conversation and walk away.
- Attempt to resolve their grievance (if possible) in the same way you would a guest who was behaving in a calm and collected manner.
- Involve management or supervisory staff if you feel the need to do so.
- Don't hesitate to call security or even call the police if a guest becomes abusive, threatening or aggressive.

Guest collapses:

- Don't panic - it's essential to remain calm and level-headed.
- Call the emergency services immediately.
- Contact your department manager and/or the hotel general manager.
- If there is a designated first aider, call them straight away.
- Do not attempt to move an unconscious person, unless you have the required first aid training or have been instructed to do so.
- The emergency services will tell you exactly what to do - follow their instructions to the letter.
- Close off the area to avoid distressing other guests.

Armed Robbery

- Your hotel will have its own specific policies on how to deal with these kinds of criminal threats.
- Generally, it's a case of complying with every instruction the intruder provides and remaining as calm as possible.
- Under no circumstances should you ever try to tackle or overpower a robber - irrespective of whether or not they are armed.
- Remember that businesses are insured against incidents like these - let them take what they want and don't put your health and safety (or anyone else's) on the line.

Guest has been robbed/incident of theft

- This is surprisingly common in a hotel setting, so don't be too surprised when theft is reported.
- Take a detailed record of the incident from the guest - what was stolen, where from, when they had it last, who has access to their room and so on.
- Report the incident to your line manager and contact the police.
- If a guest reports an incident involving an individual who was armed, treat it as a major incident and call the emergency services right away.

Suspected food poisoning

- Immediately contact the kitchen and inform them so an incident report may be filed.
- Involve senior hotel management.
- Find out from the guest what they have eaten and where, and get them to sign a confirmation of this.
- Inform housekeeping so that any infection control policies can be implemented.

Guest leaves without paying

- Again, you'd be surprised how often this happens.
- Try to remember that while some guests deliberately leave without paying, others leave convinced they've been charged for their stay, when in fact they haven't.
- Assume that the incident is a simple misunderstanding, unless you have direct evidence to the contrary.
- Immediately attempt to charge the credit card used by the guest to make the booking, before calling them to advise the charge has been made.
- In the event that the payment method cannot be charged, contact the guest and inform them of their outstanding bill.
- Should you be unable to take payment from the guest that has now departed, refer the case to senior management.
- If it is clear a guest is attempting to leave without paying their bill, call security and inform senior management. Don't attempt to chase them and confront them yourself - they may become violent or aggressive.

A guest injures themselves

- Use your hotel's accident report documentation to record the incident.
- Call the emergency services if the incident is severe.
- Refer the incident to senior management and relevant department managers.
- Provide basic first aid *only* if you are qualified/authorised to do so.
- NEVER give guests drugs like OTC painkillers - it is illegal

A bedroom goes out of order

- Make a note that the room isn't available in your reservation system.
- If the room has already been allocated, reallocate the guest accordingly
- If the room is occupied when the incident occurs, transfer the guest to a different room as quickly as possible
 - You may end up overbooked as a result of a room going out of order. In which case, you will need to enforce your hotel's out-booking policy accordingly.
 - Ensure the problem is reported to the relevant personnel and department heads, as soon as it is brought to your attention.

A guest damages their room

- Inform the guest that they will be charged the specified fee as agreed in your hotel's terms, conditions and guest policies.
- Take the payment as quickly as possible after being made aware of the damages.
- If you are unable to charge the credit or debit card they used when making the booking, call them and inform them they have an outstanding charge with the hotel.
- Refer the incident to your line manager (or more senior personnel) if you encounter any difficulties.

A guest smokes in their room

- Inform the guest that by smoking in a room that is not a designated smoking room, they have broken the law.
- Tell the guest that they will be charged the agreed 'cleaning fee' as specified in your hotel's terms and conditions.
- Confirm the charge with your line manager, before going ahead and charging the guest's credit or debit card.
- If it's deemed necessary to remove the guest from the hotel for failing to comply with building policies, this will be usually be handled by senior management and/or security personnel.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Michael J. Fagel, (2014), Crisis Management and Emergency Planning .*