



# UNIT 3

## Housekeeping, Engineering & Security

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Explain the functions of the Housekeeping Department
- ✓ Explore different Managerial Styles
- ✓ Assess the importance of Hotel Security

## Unit 3

### Housekeeping, Engineering & Security

#### Housekeeping

Efficiently managed housekeeping departments ensure the cleanliness, maintenance and aesthetic appeal of lodging properties. The housekeeping department not only prepares clean guest rooms on a timely basis for arriving guests but also cleans and maintains everything in the hotel. (Kappa, Nitschke and Schappert, 1997)

As implied by the name, housekeeping activities are linked with the maintenance of a hotel establishment. The main duty of the housekeeping department is to maintain the cleanliness of the hotel, including both back-of-the-house and front-of-the-house areas. Setting good standards in room cleaning and public area cleaning can ensure a comfortable, safe and hygienic environment for hotel guests and staff in the property.

In the traditional structure, it can be said that housekeeping oversees four chief areas of obligation:

1. Management of people, equipment and supplies;
2. Preservation of building finishes, fabrics and furnishings;
3. Cost control; and
4. Record-keeping

#### Organisation of Housekeeping Department

Operating even a small hotel of thirty rooms will require huge amounts of linen and a medium-sized staff for cleaning and keeping the hotel hospitable for the guests. Typically the housekeeping department is the largest department in a hotel and has a large number of staff members. Hence, this department in every hotel must have a highly organised set-up regardless of the hotel's size.

Some of the department's main responsibilities can be described briefly as follows:

- a) Housekeeping Manager:** This employee may also be referred to as the Head or Executive Housekeeper and is the one ultimately accountable for the staff deployment, development, profitability and operating standards of the department. A successful housekeeping manager needs to be able to delegate and offer community guidance and direction. Such skills are essential in a housekeeping manager. It is the housekeeping manager who has the overall responsibility for the standards of cleanliness, maintenance, and the financial accomplishments of the department.
- b) Floor Supervisor:** This employee, otherwise known as the floor housekeeper, is in charge of a given floor and a set number of rooms. His/her chief job is to ensure the quality and efficiency of the room attendants. Once the room has been inspected and meets the set standards, it is "handed" to the front office for renting to a guest. Additionally, the floor supervisors provide training to the new room attendants while re-training the existing staff in corrective methods. Finally, they are

responsible for the apparatus, for controlling costs within their domains of responsibility, and for liaising with other departments such as maintenance and the front office. The management of linen, refuse and cleaning gear is also the duty of the floor supervisor. Dispatching used linen to the laundry and obtaining clean linen for the following day's room cleaning are vital aspects of the job. A precise inventory of the linen in the linen closet also has to be maintained at all times.

- c) **Room Attendants:** Room attendants are also called housekeeping assistants. They are essentially required to maintain very high standards of cleanliness in the rooms allotted to them. Cleaning a room includes vacuuming it, rubbing down toilets, replenishing used toiletries, changing linen and towels and ensuring that the basic set-up of the room is proper. Reporting any maintenance issues to the appropriate department personnel is another key function carried out by room attendants. At times, guests ask the room attendants about the local amenities or hotel facilities; in answering these queries the room attendants play their role in customer relations. All of these duties have to be carried out in an allotted amount of time as the attendants are assigned a specific number of rooms to maintain.

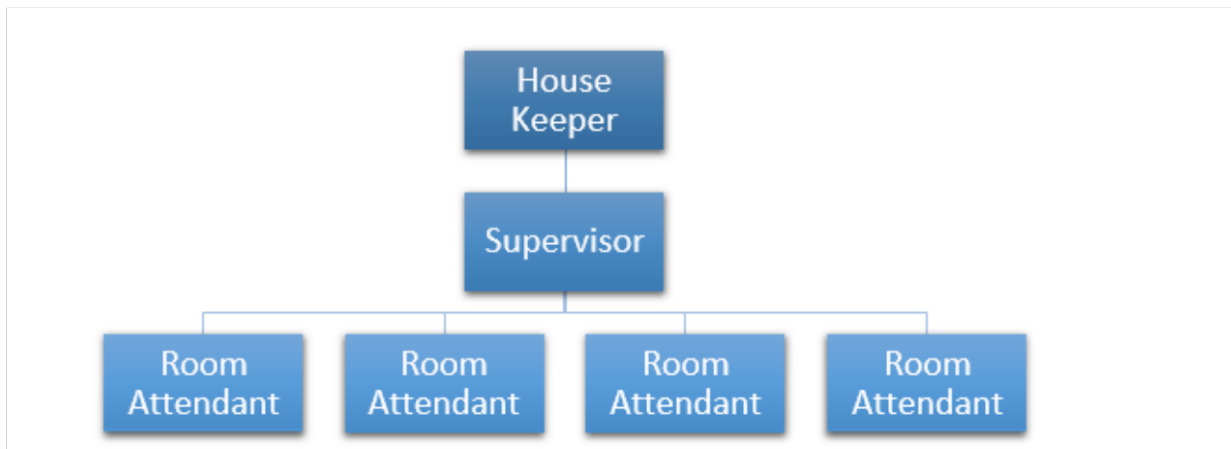


Fig. 3.1

## The Functions of the Housekeeping Department

Cleaning the floors beyond the bedrooms is an extended function of housekeeping and this can include the staircases, public cloakrooms and other public areas of the property. At times, outside agencies are employed to clean the public areas such as the lobby and restaurant area in addition to the men's and women's restrooms. Such activities are conducted at odd hours or times when there is a minimal public presence in these areas. The standard of cleanliness must be upheld and it is the responsibility of the executive housekeeper to ensure that pre-set standards of cleanliness are followed in every area of the hotel, be it the fire-exit stairwells, the goods lifts, or any other area in the public domain. To ensure this, the executive housekeeper begins his/her day with rounds, followed by an assistant housekeeper responsible for all public areas.

The department must therefore strive to maintain the set standards after they have been approved. Other areas that come under the housekeeping department include:



Fig: 3.2

- 1) The Lost and Found Department:** Quite often, during the cleaning process, a room attendant will come across personal items left behind by the guests. The value of the items may range from almost nothing to thousands of pounds, such as a Rolex watch, etc. All such items found in the process of cleaning the rooms must be handed over by the attendants to the floor supervisors. They, in turn, make a list of all articles found against specific room numbers.
- 2) First Aid:** If a guest requires first aid, it is provided by the housekeeping department, which maintains the first aid kit.
- 3) Floral Arrangement:** Another duty of the housekeeping department is to maintain fresh floral arrangements all around the hotel. All arrangements in the public areas such as the lobby or restaurants and private areas such as the guest bedrooms are displayed by the housekeeping department.
- 4) Laundry Services:** The laundry services available to guests staying in the hotel are typically offered by housekeeping. The items to be laundered are collected from the guest's room, washed,

dried, and ironed and brought back to the guest's room. Previously, all hotels maintained in-house laundry services but nowadays many hotels outsource this service both for the hotel linen and the guests' laundry.

**5) Purchasing:** This role of the housekeeping department involves transactions of many funds. Hence, it is an important section where the profitability of the hotel may be affected if the range of products is not purchased with care and supplies are not managed wisely. The chief purchasing areas under the umbrella of the executive housekeeping area include the following:

- a) Bedroom supplies: e.g., laundry bags, breakfast, cards, and shoeshine, etc.;
- b) Bathroom supplies: e.g., toiletries;
- c) Linen: bed sheets and toweling;
- d) Tea- and coffee-making facilities (TCMF): e.g., tea/coffee sachets, sugar, milk and biscuits;
- e) Working replacements: e.g., shower curtains, crockery, glassware, vacuum cleaners and trolleys, etc.;
- f) Cleaning supplies: e.g., air freshener, bleach and cleaning products;
- g) Uniforms: e.g., for the room attendants/porters.
- h) The executive housekeeper must ensure that the supplies and their consumption are monitored. The list of items in the purchasing list can be further classified into:
  - i. Consumables: bedroom supplies, cleaning supplies, and TCMF
  - ii. Assets: uniforms, working replacements, and linen.

(Source: *Accommodation Management*, edited by Constantinos S. Verginis and Roy C. Wood).

Different policies are maintained for the two distinct groups of purchases by the Executive Housekeeping. The true usage of the first group of purchases (consumables) can be projected according to the occupancy rate of the hotel. Since it is vital to maintain these items in stock, the staff can request their requisition on a daily or weekly basis. Hence, the Executive Housekeeper must not only establish the demand for but also control the use of consumable items through the maintenance of detailed invoices and requisitions. The number of consumable items is considerable, and failure to conduct proper monitoring will obviously affect the overall profit statement of the hotel. Nowadays, computers help to carry out this function.

"Assets," albeit not in the true sense, include items such as uniforms; they are not consumed on a regular basis and do not need to be replaced daily. However, the staff are responsible for maintaining their uniforms and they must present themselves immaculately dressed every day. Other items such as vacuum cleaners or crockery are handed out over a given period of time and are recorded as depreciation. The hotel linen is hard to manage since, in a large hotel, roughly 5,000 items of dirty linen are sent to the laundry every day. To count and recheck the linen to and from the laundry is a very difficult job. Additionally, guests have a tendency to pilfer things such as towels. It is a top priority for the housekeeping manager to monitor the linen stock, maintain it and restock it when necessary.

## Management of Guest Amenities

Every hotel keeps a list of amenities that they make available to their guests in every room. The housekeeping department is responsible for supplying these consumable goods to every room.

**Table 3.1: Specific Amenities**

	<b>600 Room Deluxe Class Hotel, City Centre location, Mainly Business Bookings</b>	<b>800 Room Medium Class Hotel, Suburban location, Mainly Group Bookings</b>
<b>Entrance</b>	“Do Not Disturb” card	“Do Not Disturb” card Breakfast menu Fire escape plan
<b>Desk Top</b>	Telephone directory Fire escape plan Typhoon safety regulations IDD booklet Guidebook Breakfast menu Sewing kit Ball pen Food and beverage information	Guest directory Guidebook Tent card promotion Ashtray Match box Folder with standard stationeries
<b>Desk-top Folder</b>	Letter paper/envelopes Telex/Fax forms Thank you and postcards Cable Television guide Blotting paper Limousine service Health spa information	
<b>Closet</b>	Laundry bags and list Dry cleaning bag and list Leather shoehorn Leather clothes brush Shoe shine kit Shoehorn Hangers	Laundry bags and list Shopping bag Wooden hangers

<b>Mini Bar Services</b>	Glasses and ice bucket Bottle opener Water (mineral/distilled) Coasters Mini bar on request	Ice bucket Opener Glasses with coaster Red wine glasses – 2 on request Champagne glasses – 2 304 glasses – 2 306 glasses – 2 Tumbler – 1 Napkins – 2 Stirrers – 2
		Drink voucher Rattan basket with liquor
<b>Bedside Table</b>	Int'l direct - dialing telephone Control panel/switches Radio channels	Int'l direct dialing telephone Control panel/switches Radio channels Phone directory
<b>Sitting Area</b>	Television set Remote control Magazines/Newspapers Flowers	Television set Remote control Magazines/Newspapers Flowers
<b>Bathroom</b>	Bath towels – 2 Hand towels – 2 Face towels – 2 Tissue box and tissues Tumblers with coaster Soap dish with soap Foam bath and shampoo Rubbish bin Sanitary bag Shoe shine mitt Shaving socket Bathrobes Slippers Glass jar and cotton buds Bath salts Bottle opener Vase (bud) Emery board Mild clothes detergent Shower cap Hair dryer	Bath towels – 2 Hand towels – 2 Face towels – 2 Tissue box and tissues Tumblers with coaster Soap dish with soap Foam bath and shampoo Rubbish bin Sanitary bag Shoe shine mitt Shaving socket Plant

<b>Upon Request</b>	Swimming goggles Adaptors/Transformers Heaters Iron (with board) Baby supplies/crib Extension cord Clothes rack Luggage rack Comb Disposable razor Shaving cream	Adaptors Heaters Iron (with board) Baby supplies/crib
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(Source: *Hotel Management*, Sue Baker)

Merely supplying these amenities is not sufficient. It is the job of the housekeeping department to manage and maintain these goods. The housekeeping staff has to monitor the usable items in the rooms to determine their success in terms of profit or loss to the hotel. The hotel needs to devise a set standard for maintaining the room. A very simple and systematic method of delivering standardised service is to make use of a checklist.

### Room Status Codes

Special codes and terminologies are widely used by hotels to enhance inter-departmental communications. Room status codes are mainly applied by the housekeeping and front office departments orally or in writing and can always be seen in reports of rooms' division and computer systems.

One typical example of how these special codes and terminology are used can be seen when a guest checks out at the front desk and settles his account. The front desk computer system will automatically change the room status to 'Vacant Dirty' or 'VD.' This enables housekeeping staff to make up the room promptly for new guests. Once the 'Vacant Dirty' room is made ready for rent, the housekeeping department will notify the front desk by changing the room status to 'Vacant Clean' ('VC') or 'Inspected Clean' ('I').

Some common examples and their detailed descriptions are shown in Table 2.14 below:

Terminologies	Codes	Descriptions
<b>Occupied Clean</b>	OC	The room is occupied and has been cleaned by room attendant
<b>Occupied Dirty</b>	OD	The room is occupied and hasn't been cleaned by room attendant

<b>Vacant Clean /</b>	VC / VR	The room is vacant and has been cleaned by room attendant or ready for sale
<b>Vacant Dirty</b>	VD	The room is vacant and hasn't been cleaned by room attendant
<b>Do Not Disturb</b>	DND	The guest has requested no disturbances
<b>Out of Order</b>	OOO	The room is under maintenance, refurbishment or extensive cleaning
<b>Extra Bed</b>	XB	An extra bed is being used in the guest room
<b>Light Baggage</b>	LB	An occupied room with no large baggage, e.g. trunk
<b>No Baggage</b>	NB	An occupied room with no baggage
<b>No Need Service</b>	NNS	The guest has requested 'no service' for the room
<b>Sleep-out</b>	SO	The guest is supposed to be staying in the room but the bed has no signs of being used
<b>Check-out</b>	CO	The guest has paid the bill and checked out
<b>Expected Departure</b>	ED	This is the same as 'due-out', which means the guest will depart prior to the check-out time on the following day

<b>Inspected Clean</b>	I	The room has been double-checked by the floor supervisor after being cleaned by the room attendant
<b>Did Not Check</b>	DNCO	The guest has paid or made payment arrangements but has not completed the check-out processes or informed the front desk while leaving
<b>Late Check-out</b>	/	The guest has requested and been approved for check-out later than the standard check-out time
<b>Skipper</b>	/	The guest has not paid and has left without informing the front desk
<b>Complimentary</b>	/	The room is occupied free of charge
<b>Stay-over</b>	/	The guest is not checking out today and will remain at least one more night
<b>Lock-out</b>	/	The occupied room has been locked, thus preventing the guest from re-entering until he/she comes into contact with hotel staff to clarify his/her status

**Table 3.2 - Room Status Codes and Terminologies**

## Managerial Styles



Fig: 3.3

- **Coercive:** The “do-it-the-way-I-tell-you” manager closely controls his subordinates and motivates by threats and discipline only.
- **Authoritative:** The “firm-but-fair” manager provides workers with clear direction, motivates by persuasion and provides feedback on their performance of their assigned jobs and tasks.
- **Affiliative:** The “people - first, task - second” manager stresses good personal relationships among his staff and motivates by trying to keep people happy with fringe benefits, security and social activities.
- **Democratic:** The “participative” manager encourages input in decision-making among his subordinates and motivates by rewarding team effort.
- **Pacesetter:** The “do it myself” manager completes many of the tasks personally, expects subordinates to follow his or her example and motivates by establishing high standards and allowing subordinates to work on independently.
- **Coaching:** The “developmental” manager aids and encourages subordinates to further improve their functioning and motivates by providing chances for professional development. (McBer, no date)

The profile of managerial style has an effect on both primary and backup styles. Primary is the type of behaviour one makes use of most frequently, is most at ease with, and is the method to which one normally turns when in stress. *Backup* refers to an alternative way of managing when the primary style is ineffective.

## Engineering

In one respect, engineering, housekeeping and security can all be thought of as guest services. In the majority of hotels, guest services are a visible facet that may include concierge, uniformed service, garage, and specialised recreational and leisure activities. Housekeeping, guest and hotel security, and maintenance of the engineering systems of the hotel are typically behind the scenes and are not noticed; they interact with the guests not directly but in an abstract way.

However, they are critical services if guests are to enjoy a safe, comfortable and, by extrapolation, successful stay at the hotel.

## Security

The security department of the hotel is essential for delivering hospitality to the guests. This department is responsible for setting the details of the following systems -

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

These operational procedures are never fully valued until a crime takes place or disaster hits the hotel. They are thought to be operative but tend to take second place to taking care of the guests' more immediate requirements and meeting the financial objectives of the hotel.

National, state, and local safety codes and ordinances require the hotelier to offer a safe environment to the guests. This section highlights safety awareness as it is linked to the front office manager's job and how the front office helps make this vital service available to guests.

## Importance of a Security Department

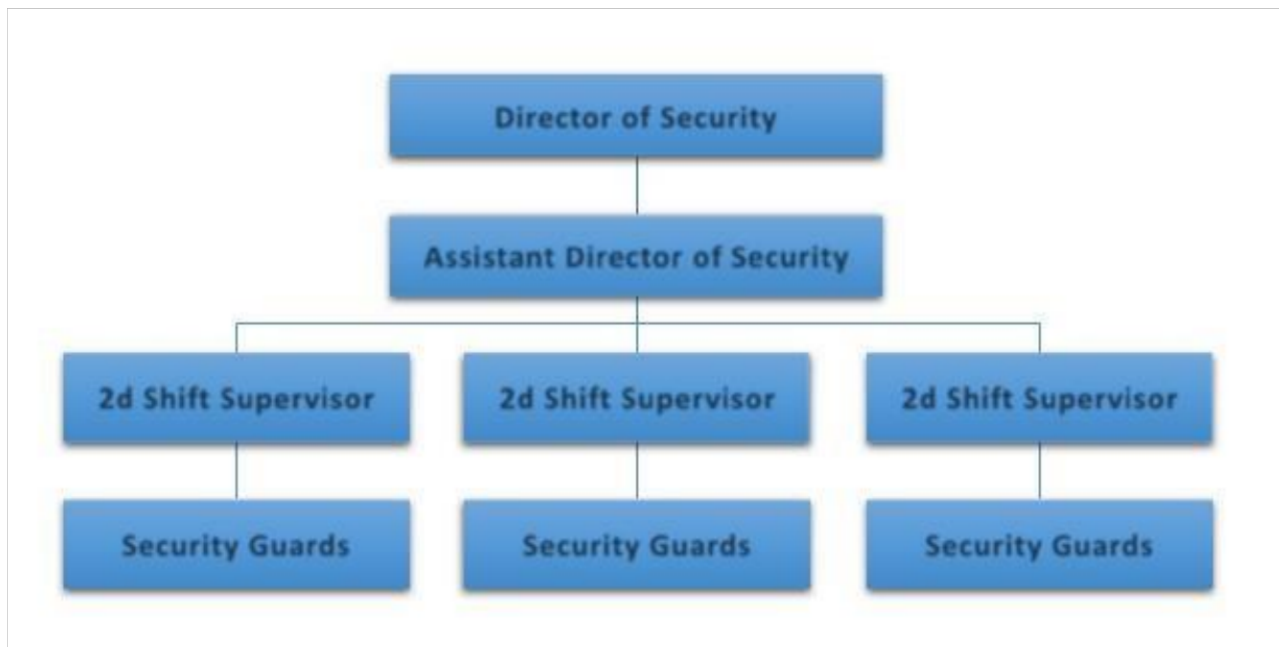
The front office is the communications centre of the hotel. It is a vital link between the hotel, management and the guests. When a call is made for assistance due to illness, theft, fire or any other emergency, it is typically the front office that has to respond. The front office on-duty staff cannot leave their station to resolve the emergency as they must continue to provide communication services and process financial transactions. It is the security department's staff who have to react with speed and urgency to serve and protect the guests.

The security department is frequently considered a passive department, reacting only when called upon. In reality, it is a very active department, establishing policies, organising programmes, and imparting training programmes to endorse guest and employee safety. The director of security is a trained professional who has to ensure that a busy hotel loaded with guests, employees and equipment remains safe. One of the aims of the department is to avert emergencies through proper planning. Another aim, however, is to train all hotel employees to respond to emergencies.

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

- **Building entrances**—a review of the property should ensure that all entrances are welcoming and brightly lit with no shrubbery in the way. At night, access to side entrances should be restricted by the use of card readers, thus requiring non-registered guests to go through the lobby and pass the main check-in desk.
- **Hotel lobbies**—These need to be designed to be visually open, with minimal blind spots for the front desk workers. Lobbies should also be designed in such a way that people walking through the front door have to pass the front desk to reach the guestroom corridors or elevators.
- **Guestrooms**—Electronic locking systems ensure that keys are automatically changed when a new guest checks in; locks may be integrated to reveal the identity of the last person to enter the room.
- **Guest amenities** – Marriott plans its new properties using more glass in doors and walls to allow maximum witness potential when building swimming pools, exercise rooms, laundry facilities and vending areas. The addition of house phones in these locations allows guests to call for help if they feel there is a threat or they are uncomfortable with the presence of some people.
- **Exterior of the property** – The CPTED philosophy requires bright lighting at all entrances and walkways. Traffic should be guided towards the front of the hotel property to make potential criminals as noticeable as possible. Entrances leading to hotel grounds should be minimised. Landscaping using shrubbery or hedges can be utilised in aesthetically pleasing ways to guide the desired traffic and pedestrian flow.

- **Parking** – Metal Halide Lighting is the preferred choice here. Avoid high-pressure sodium lights as they cast a harsh yellow light. The ideal parking lot or garage should have one entrance and exit with clearly marked routes for pedestrians and cars. Garages should be as spacious as possible, with clear lines of sight. Elevators and stairwells leading from the garage into the hotel should open into the hotel lobby level, from where a different set of stairs or elevators should be used to reach the guestroom floors. Other CPTED elements for the garage should include CCTV (closed-circuit television), emergency call boxes, cameras, and walls painted white to enhance the luminosity of the lighting and create an environment that is appealing to the eye.



**Fig: 3.4** Organisation chart for a security department

## Organisation of a Security Department

The security department of the hotel should be organised like any other department. The director is the head of the department and it is his/her responsibility to maintain a safe atmosphere for the guests and employees. The security director must have technology, personnel, and a budget to run a 24-hour control system on the property. Depending on the size of the property, it may be necessary to have an assistant director of security to deputise for the director and help with the administrative and supervisory role of the department.

The director of security works for and reports to the general manager in addition to keeping in touch with each department head. Each shift (7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 3 p.m. to 11 p.m., and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.) has its own shift supervisor and security guards who are responsible for patrolling the grounds to monitor the activities of the employees and guests and inspect the security equipment. The workforce needed to staff this department depends on the size of the property. Figure 3.4 is an organisation chart outlining the security department for a large hotel.

## In-House Security Departments versus Contracted Security Services

The general manager of a property has to decide whether running an in-house security department is cost-effective. Running a well-organised security department has to be the main concern when thinking of hiring an outside security firm. As the job analysis for the director of security showed, the position requires more than merely patrolling the halls and grounds of the property. **Foot patrols** - walking the halls, corridors and outdoor areas of a hotel to check for breaches in guest and employee safety - are a vital feature of security, but this is a preventive measure, not an active way of organising security. However, under some conditions, the general manager may be forced, for monetary reasons, to think of hiring an outside service. Administrative and planning methods for running a security department may be entrusted to other department heads. The cost factor must be calculated against planning and coordinating a safe atmosphere for the guest and employee.

The hourly rate charged by a security service for escort duties, carrying out periodic hall patrols and conducting surveillance of the parking garage may appear very appealing compared to the annual salaries and administrative overheads incurred in running an in-house security department 24 hours a day. But additional factors, beyond cost, have to be considered. Who will coordinate with other department directors to set up fire safety and security procedures? Who will design and execute fire safety and security training sessions? Who will supervise fire safety devices? Who will coordinate with city officials in interpreting fire and safety codes? Who will bring management up to date with the latest technology to ensure that a safe environment is maintained? These and other considerations will have to be addressed if owners and management are committed to the idea of security.

If an external security service is engaged, the duty of maintaining security is delegated to the various department heads. The director of maintenance can run the fire safety and security equipment, maintain operating ledgers of fire safety equipment and elevators, and respond to dangerous situations. If time allows, the general manager will assemble a safety committee to respond to government directives and potential dangers. Each department director, if time allows, will institute security guidelines based on prior personal experience. In these situations, safety and security will end up as low priorities.

Encountering the challenges of providing security to guests and employees needs a full-time approach. Part-time endeavours to control crises in a hotel may be short-sighted.

### Room Key Security

Among the responsibilities of the director of security is to set up and maintain a **Room Key Control System**, an administrative process that gives limited personnel and registered guests access to keys.

While the issuing and filing of keys are responsibilities of the front office employees, room key control entails a little more. Room locks and keys are one of the most efficient methods of ensuring guest safety.

Typically, one of two different lock systems are used -the hard-key system or the electronic key system. **Hard-Key systems** are made up of a conventional large key that fits into the keyhole in a lock; the tumblers inside are preset and turn with the designated key. The **Electronic Key System** consists of

battery-powered or, more rarely, hardwired locks, a computer, terminals for hosting, a keypuncher and **distinctive** entry cards, which are used in place of keys. The host computer will generate combinations for the locks, terminate the old ones and keep an account of master keying systems. The front desk staff utilise a minimum of one computer terminal to register a guest and an additional keypuncher to create the card. An electronic locking system enables the hotel to produce a “fresh” key for each guest. Once the guest inserts the key into the door, the lock’s smart microchip scans the combination punched on the key and accepts it as the new, legitimate combination for the door, rendering all prior combinations inoperative.

A separate variation of the electronic key is the **smart card**, an electronic device housing a computer chip that gives a hotel guest or employee access to the assigned area, tracking, and debit-card abilities for the guest.

Electronic key access is one of the numerous variations that the property managers can select for their guests to use. The system has an electronically coded key and door controllers that may be programmed easily to identify one or more codes. Because the electronic keys contain allocated codes from among the many billion possible combinations, they are practically impossible to copy.

## Fire Safety

Hearing someone yell “Fire!” will create panic among those not prepared to deal with this hazardous situation. Well-coordinated safety procedures that are properly managed at the onset of the fire can have lifesaving implications for employees and guests. The front office manager and the director of security must create effective fire safety and flight plans, as well as training programmes for the workforce to ensure the plans’ usefulness.

## Fire Code General Requirements

To make a fire safety plan, you must start with the fire safety codes of the municipality in which the hotel is situated. These codes will specify construction materials, entrance and exit requirements, interior design fabrics, smoke alarm installation and maintenance, space limitations, sprinkler system and maintenance, fire drill testing, fire alarm operation and maintenance, and other related items. These detailed codes were developed to ensure guest safety. They may require extra monetary investment, but they are designed to protect the guests and other occupants of the establishment.

## Guest Expectations

Consciously or unconsciously, hotel guests expect to be provided with a safe environment for the duration of their stay. Some guests may seek a room on the lower levels or make inquiries regarding smoke alarm installation. However, most guests will not ask about fire safety measures. Once the guests are settled into their rooms, they may take a passing glance at the evacuation procedure posted behind the door.

Some guests may even count the number of doors to the closest exit. Is this sufficient? Will human lives be in danger because guests’ other, more important, issues have caused them to put their safety in the hands of the management and employees of the property?

## Fire Safety Plan

The front office manager wishing to take active precautions to ensure guest safety has to develop a simple fire safety plan, pass it on to the employees and guests, and train employees and guests to cope with a difficult situation. All this will include the commonsense ideas below:

1. Install smoke detectors in every guest room and public area and link them to a central communications area;
2. Test and maintain smoke detectors on a regular basis and maintain up-to-date records of the tests;
3. Install, maintain and test fire alarms according to local fire code regulations; maintain up-to-date records of the tests;
4. Regularly check smoke detectors and fire alarm systems (If possible, at the front desk);
5. Prepare and post plans of floors showing fire exit points by area - public area, work area, and the guestrooms area;
6. Offer instructions for guests and employees regarding the location of the nearest fire extinguishers and fire alarm location, along with the procedures for evacuating the building and fire safety guidelines; and
7. Draw up a fire action communication plan for the front office personnel.

## Employee Training in Fire Safety

When employees are provided with training programmes on the locations of the fire exits, fire extinguishers and fire alarms, and on how to evacuate a building, it is much more likely that every occupant will escape the building in relative safety if the need arises. After providing the training to the new and existing employees regarding fire exits, extinguishers and alarms in the building, supervisors can carry out spot-checks on the efficiency of the training with arbitrary questions such as: “Where is the nearest fire exit when you are cleaning rooms? Where is the nearest fire extinguisher when you are in the bakery? Where is the nearest fire alarm when you are in the laundry?” Such basic questions, repeated frequently, teach employees the importance of fire safety.

Employees can be trained to use the fire extinguishers by the local fire department or the Director of Security. Informal training sessions like these should include operational procedures and information on using the right type of fire extinguisher. Once a fire starts, it is too late to start reading instructions. Training sessions will give employees confidence in their ability to handle an emergency.

## Guest Instruction in Fire Safety

The importance of frequently providing guests with fire safety instructions is often overlooked. Guests come to the hotel to enjoy themselves and relax. However, a fire can strike without warning, even when all appears calm. Guests should be informed about the smoke detectors in each room and the location of the nearest fire exit from any room (which should be no more than four doors away); they should be told that the fire extinguisher can be found next to the elevator on every floor, and that the fire can be reported by dialling “0” for the hotel operator. This will let the guests know that the hotel is serious about their wellbeing and that it has taken every precaution to ensure that the equipment is available and in good working order.

Management may want to prompt the guests to read evacuation guidelines posted on the doors of the

guest rooms by offering enticing promotions. For example, during registration, the guest might be informed about the special coupon attached to the fire evacuation plan posted on the door. This coupon may be used for a two-for-one breakfast special or a free cover charge in the lounge, a free morning newspaper, a gift shop discount, or other similar incentives.

Hotel managers should also concern themselves with accommodation for physically challenged guests. **Visual Alarm Systems**, flashing lights that point out a fire or other emergency in the hotel room, need to be installed to alert guests with hearing impairments. A report on the location of physically challenged guests should be easily accessible in case of an emergency.

## Emergency Communication

At times, all guests and employees are required to evacuate a building in non-emergency situations. While it is vital that the building is emptied, the evacuation is not as urgent as it would be in the event of a fire. Situations where such evacuations become necessary include a bomb threat, a fire in the next building, gas leaks, or power outages. In such cases, an emergency communication system needs to be in place to ensure a disciplined evacuation.

The Director of Security, in combination with the front office manager and the civil authorities, should devise a plan for every department. The task of the front office is vital in directing communications with guests and employees. It is the duty of the front office staff to alert guests and employees about an emergency. The emergency communication plan should set up a **communication hierarchy**, which lists the order in which management personnel should be assigned to take charge; it should also stress cooperation between hotel and civil authorities and make training available.

## Developing the Emergency Communication Plan

The director of security, the front office manager and the civil authorities must work together to establish an emergency communications plan. These are the individuals responsible for drawing up a plan to be used in the event of a life-threatening emergency, and it should include considerations for staff and employee training.

## Responsibilities of the Front Office

1. Stay calm. Note down the name, phone number, affiliation, and location of the individual calling.
2. Immediately alert the emergency communications manager on duty about the impending danger. If the main telephone service to the hotel has been deactivated, use a cellular phone.
3. Inform the front desk clerk of the approaching danger. Produce a room list of all registered guests in the hotel. Produce a list of all social functions that are in progress.
4. Alert the emergency communications leaders on duty in each hotel department. These people will need to report to the front office at once. An emergency action meeting will be conducted with the emergency communications manager on duty. The lists of registered guests and social functions in progress will assist in the evacuation.
5. The emergency communications manager on duty will tell you which authorities must be alerted:
  - Police department: 000-0000
  - Fire department: 000-0000
  - Bomb squad: 000-0000

- Electricity company: 000–0000
  - Gas company: 000–0000
  - Water company: 000–0000
  - Rescue squad: 000–0000
  - Red Cross: 000–0000
  - Owner of hotel: 000–0000
  - General Manager: 000–0000
6. Answer all telephone inquiries as guided by the emergency communications manager on duty.
  7. Stay at the front office to handle emergency communications until told to evacuate by the emergency communications manager on duty.

## Employee Safety Programmes

The hospitality industry carries a high risk of employee accidents. Behind the scenes, there are numerous people squeezed into small work areas, busy preparing food and beverages, and carrying out other services for the guests. Those most in danger are employees using equipment in need of repair, those working in very congested areas and those depending on other employees who are not attentive to the job at hand. The front of the house is also prone to potential accidents. Employees and guests have to use public areas that may be congested or dilapidated from overuse. The following information on hotel law offers insights into the innkeeper's obligations.

The innkeeper has to regularly inspect the facility to uncover hidden or dormant defects and then eliminate or repair them. While repairs are being carried out, the innkeeper must warn guests of the presence of danger and its location.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Hotel Housekeeping: Operations and Management, (2016), By Mr G. Raghubalan, Ms Smritee Raghubalan*
- ✓ *Managing Front Office Operations, (2020), By Michael L. Kasavana, Ph.D.*