Air Quality In Hotels Is Nothing To Sneeze At

Hotel Air Quality

According to a study by the International Hotel & Restaurant Association, more than two-thirds of frequent travelers are concerned about air quality, and 60 percent indicated they had suffered poor sleep, a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, headache, cough or sore throat as a result of staying in a hotel room with poor indoor air quality.

The Environmental Protection Agency ranks indoor air pollution as one of the top environmental threats to human health and increasing attention is being focused on the importance of good indoor air quality and its affect on sleep and health. Accordingly, the EPA says that the air indoors is 4 to 100 times more polluted with chemicals, gases, and living organisms like mold and pests than the air outdoors- even the outdoor air of the most polluted cities like Las Vegas, New York and Los Angeles.

Several sources of air pollution cause mild health problems such as sore eyes, burning in the nose and throat, headaches, or fatigue, but other pollutants cause or worsen allergies, respiratory illnesses, heart disease, cancer, and other serious long-term conditions. As a result, allergies and other respiratory conditions such as asthma are on the rise with over 50% of the population suffering with allergy problems and spending on allergy and asthma relief at over $5 billion per year.

The problem is amplified in hotels (especially those built prior to the 1970's building codes) whose weak air exchange and lack of proper insulation and sealing agents make them more susceptible to trap air borne particulates, odors, molds, bacteria, cleaning fumes and other allergens that harbor the vast majority of contaminants that cause indoor air pollution.

Surprisingly, the routine and vigorous cleaning of most hotels actually stirs up dust and other contaminants and puts more of it in the air. Likewise, the common cleaning agents used in most cleaning supplies and pesticides contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These hazardous chemicals not only contaminate our groundwater, lakes and oceans, through evaporation and run-off, but they are also a major cause of indoor air pollution. It's also important to note, that these cleaning materials and deodorizers usually only mask odors and do not kill or control the allergens related.

Who's Sleeping With Your Guests?

Despite your quality amenities, restaurants and bars, your guests will spend nearly 1/3 of their travel sleeping, eating and drinking in your beds. Every night, they produce up to half a liter of sweat & shed about a gram of skin making your hotel room and especially your mattresses vulnerable to quickly becoming a host to a multitude of horrors, from bacteria and molds to bed bugs and dust mites. According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (ACAAI), the microorganisms living in mattresses are pathogens that can cause severe allergies, infections, fever and other dangers to your guest's health that are suggested to be the cause of 50% of all illnesses as well as cause staining, odor, and damage to the mattress's support.

Although sheets and other linens can be washed, the mattress, box spring and pillows are rarely ever sanitized. Even a relatively new mattress can quickly become one of the dirtiest places in your hotel suites. In fact, it can take as little as six months for a brand new mattress to reach a level of contamination where it would be classified as needing detoxification.

According to the National Health Institute, 54.3% of the American population suffers from allergies and respiratory ailments. Allergic reactions such as watery, itchy eyes, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion can occur is as little as two minutes of exposure to allergen irritants such as mold and dust mites that thrive and accumulate in the micro-habitat of mattresses and are a leading cause allergies, eczema, and rhinitis as well as factor for 50-80% percent of asthmatics.

Mold growth can occur anytime your mattress is exposed to moisture through humidity, spills, food or even body fluids. Mattresses

exposed to sustained moisture allow for mold colonies to multiply and thrive, which can lead to severe ailments for your guests, but additional concerns arise due to the fire retardant chemicals used in mattresses. Chemicals such as phosphorus, arsenic, and antimony can cause toxic gases to be released through the sheets when the mold begins to feed on wet mattress material.

Dust mites live on the millions of skin cells and body fluid that humans expel every night and in-turn produce small pellets of potent allergen, fecal waste called "guanine". The guanine produced by dust mites is breathed in by humans and irritate the lining of the airways and lungs causing allergic reactions. The average mattress is estimated to contain as many as 10 million mites and will double in weight every ten years from the infestation of dust mite colonies and their waste.

Guests aren't the only concern: employee's health is also greatly affected by the quality of air in the hotel. Poor air quality can result in loss of worker attention and productivity as well as costly health effects in absenteeism. In 1980, indoor air quality (IAQ) complaints represented only 8% of the National Institute's for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) requests for investigation. Now, IOSH reports that IAQ complaints represent 52% of their investigative workload.

The bottom line is that poor indoor air quality in hotels can have a negative impact on employee health, guest satisfaction and repeat business. The indoor environment is the most fundamental element of service quality. Guests want a comfortable environment free of airborne pathogens that could result in discomfort, illness, or worse and customers are now making lodging decisions based not only on price, but also on a hotel company's commitment to health and wellbeing of its guests.

Protecting Your Mattresses

Experts agree the only way to safe-guard your mattress from unwanted bugs, allergens, germs, and bacteria as well as improve the overall air quality for your guests is to keep a mattress clean and dry. Researches, allergists, and national government health organizations such as the EPA recommend the use of mattress encasements to improve indoor air quality.

A high quality encasement is an inexpensive way to protect your bedding for years to come as well as aid in the quality of sleep that your guests receive. Of course, the quality and functionality of your encasement will determine how well protected your mattress is as well as how protected your guest are. Make sure your encasements are:

- **Waterproof-** A high quality encasement keeps the mattress dry by the repellent of body fluids, liquids, and spills.
- **Hypoallergenic-** preventing dust mites, dander, mold, mildew, pollen, spores, bacteria and viruses from penetrating the mattress or box spring surface.
- **Made For Industrial Use-** Many encasements on the market were developed for consumer use and care. Meaning, their protective properties cannot withstand the high temperatures of industrial washers and dryers. Ensure your encasements is made to withstand high washing and drying temperatures of 160° Fahrenheit.
- **Lightweight And Breathable-** The breathability will help reduce perspiration and heat providing more comfort for the sleeper. Non-breathable materials such as vinyl or PVC are noisy and can become too hot or cold for your guests as well as trap in humidity. Lightweight mattress protectors also increase the washing and drying capacity and save on detergent, energy and water usage.

Protecting your mattress with a quality encasement not only protects your investment by adding years of life to your mattress, it also shows you care about your guests who have health concerns with regard to indoor air quality. A hotel committed to its guests being able to sleep better, feel better, breathe easier and being more productive has a distinct competitive advantage that improves your hotels value. It is, without a doubt, the most cost effective investment you can make.