

Hotel hygiene and safety remain a challenge

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What's the Deal By Daniel Lesser

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(The views and opinions expressed in this blog are strictly those of the author.)

Although the lodging industry has traditionally committed to cleanliness and safety, the fact is that sanitary issues at many types of lodging facilities have been a challenge for a long time. A simple Google search for “dirty” or “disgusting” hotels turns up a heap of pre-COVID-19 articles on the topic.

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year created heightened awareness of hotel sanitary conditions. In early May, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) introduced “Safe Stay,” “an industry-wide initiative focused on enhanced hotel cleaning practices, social interactions and workplace protocols to meet the new health and safety challenges and expectations presented by COVID-19.”

An AHLA Advisory Council that included leading international hotel brand and management companies representing all segments of the lodging sector provided guidance in the development of the initiative, along with Ecolab Inc., “a global leader in cleaning and disinfecting solutions and services that collaborates with the U.S. EPA, FDA, CDC, WHO and other organizations to help establish and promote best practice guidance, training and solutions.” Since its introduction, the AHLA has received endorsements of the “Safe Stay” initiative from leading scientists, physicians and public health experts in epidemiology and infectious disease.



Around the same time that initiative was launched, most of the members of the AHLA Advisory Council (hotel brands and management companies) introduced their own safety and sanitation programs including:

Accor “ALLSAFE”

Aimbridge Hospitality “AIMClean”

Best Western “We Care Clean”

Choice Hotels “Commitment to Clean”

Extended Stay America “Stay Confident”

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts “Lead With Care”

G6 Hospitality “Clean@6”

Hilton Hotels & Resorts “CleanStay”

Hyatt Hotels & Resorts “Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment”

InterContinental Hotels Group “Clean Promise”

Marriott International “Commitment to Clean”

MGM Resorts “Seven-Point Safety Plan”

Omni Hotels & Resorts “Safe & Clean”

Red Roof “RediClean”

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts “Count on Us”

Additionally, Hilton Hotels & Resorts has promoted its partnership with Reckitt Benckiser Group, whose cleaning product brands include Lysol and Dettol; and Extended Stay America announced its collaboration with P&G Professional, whose cleaning product brands include Mr. Clean and Comet.

Unfortunately, the hotel company programs are generally vaguely worded, short on specifics, and merely attempts to soothe concerned travelers with an underlying message of “we will do better.” Furthermore, I believe the rollout of these similarly named programs, all of which offer indistinguishable protocols, created confusion in the minds of the traveling public and undermined AHLA’s Safe Stay initiative.

Notwithstanding the lodging industry’s reinvigorated sanitation and cleanliness efforts, during the current public health crisis, the sector continues to be battered by negative publicity as evidenced by the following select articles:

“These high-end NYC hotels not changing sheets, wiping down surfaces” – New York Post 6/29/2020

“Hotels Tout Cleaning, But Guests Say, ‘My Room Was Dirty’” – New York Times 9/19/2020

“‘No way this room was sanitized’: Despite assurances, hotels get mixed reviews on COVID-19 cleanliness, masks” – USA Today 10/09/2020

“14 Gross Things Hotels Are Still Doing to Save Money” – Reader’s Digest 11/17/2020

While the AHLA’s Safe Stay initiative represented a new level of focus on transient lodging facility sanitation, there apparently remains no shortage of hotels throughout the nation that have failed to meet the challenge of cleanliness.

Finally, by going beyond the AHLA’s “Safe Stay” initiative in the attempt to make safety and sanitation protocols a competitive differentiator, I believe the hotel industry did itself no favors as it accomplished little if anything constructive, while merely generating consumer bewilderment.

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