

Fire Safety Awareness

Case Study

It was the usual hectic weekend at the hotel with everyone running around lending a hand wherever it was needed. The hotel was full in the Saturday night with families staying for the weekend, including lots of children, as well as a large wedding reception in the main function suite.

There had also been some maintenance work going on in one of the bedroom corridors which was causing a lot of dust. The smoke detectors had been going off throughout the day and eventually the maintenance engineer decided to put a cover on 2 of the smoke detectors where he was working to stop them going off. He had made a note to himself to remember to remove them when he finished.

The housekeeping department had had a very busy shift with a lot of departures on Saturday morning and all of the rooms required for check-in at 3pm. The executive housekeep was feeling exhausted by the end of her shift and as she finished off in the housekeeping office she began thinking about spending the rest of the evening relaxing at home. When it got to 7pm, she decided to leave tidying up the mess of paper work on her desk until Monday. As she left the office she remembered she was supposed to speak to the maintenance manager about fixing the door which was jamming and wouldn't close properly but she decided to leave that until Monday as well.

The housekeeper had been so tired and keen to get home that she had forgotten to switch her desk lamp off. As the night wore on, the lamp started to overheat. The housekeeper knew that the desk lamp was faulty but she usually switched it off during the day to let it cool down.

It was also a busy night for the porters as they had to turn the main suite round after the wedding reception in preparation for a conference of the Sunday. As usual, storage space was limited so one of the porters suggested they store some of the tables and chairs in the fire escape nearest the suite. He said that as they were going to have to reset the suite for a function on Monday night, it would be handy to have the furniture close to hand.

To make it easier to move the furniture around, some of the fire doors were wedged open using all kinds of items including cutlery, flip chart pens and fire extinguishers.

At about 11pm that night the lamp caught fire. Very quickly the fire spread to the paperwork that was scattered around the desk and the floor. It only took around 15minutes for the fire to reach the door. As the door was not closed properly the smoke made it out onto the bedroom corridor within minutes, closely followed by the flames.

Over the next half an hour the fire was able to spread along the bedroom corridor gaining more fuel from the carpet and room service trays that had been left along the corridor.

At 11.30pm the night porter was delivering room service to a room at the end of the corridor that was now on fire. As he approached he smelt a strong smell of smoke and immediately grabbed a fire extinguisher and headed along the corridor to find the source of the fire. He was only half way along the corridor before he was overcome with smoke.

At that point the smoke reached one of the smoke detectors that had not been covered, this activated the fire alarm. As guests opened their bedroom doors they were faced with a wall of black smoke.

Luckily no one was seriously injured and the fire brigade arrived in time to help all of the guests and staff escape. But the outcome could have been much worse.

It is easy to see how the culmination of people's carelessness can lead to a serious fire. In groups discuss the events in the case study that you believe were significant to the fire and record them below.

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Teacher notes

Ask each group or individuals to feedback what events they picked out as being significant to the fire. Here are some pointers:

- Busy hotel with lots of children and non-residents which can make an evacuation difficult.
- Covering up smoke detectors is not allowed. In some circumstances it is possible to isolate detectors when maintenance work is going on but must be activated as soon as the work is completed.
- The housekeeper was tired and therefore not concentrating as she should have. It is important that staff members are aware of when they feel tired that they are not putting themselves or others in danger.
- Not reporting the broken door and leaving it ajar overnight is not only a security risk but, as was demonstrated, allows a fire to spread more quickly through the hotel.
- A known fault with electrical equipment must be reported and dealt with as soon as possible. The lamp should have been taken out of use.
- At no time should furniture or anything else be stored in fire escapes. Not only does it impede people's ability to exit the building in an emergency, but it could act as fuel for a fire, allowing it to spread and prevent safe exit.
- Propping open fire doors reduces the safety of the building. Fire doors are designed to hold a fire back for up to half an hour to allow the fire to be fought and for people to exit the building safely. By propping open fire doors, fire and smoke are given a free reign of the hotel.
- The corridor was littered with room service trays and was carpeted which acts as fuel for the fire, so as it was spreading along the corridor it was gathering strength.
- The porter thought he was doing the right thing by trying to tackle the fire, however, when the fire was obviously bigger than he could handle he should have raised the alarm and assisted the guests out of the building, without putting himself or the guests in danger.
- Overall there was a lack of support and direction from hotel management which results in staff, guests and their children being put into danger.