



Best Practices for Hospitality Textile
Collection, Processing, and Replenishment
in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic



The Association for Linen Management (ALM) is a non-profit trade association dedicated to the operational excellence and professional development of personnel involved in the textile care industry.

ALM advances excellence in the textile care industry for healthcare, hospitality, correctional facilities, and long-term care providers through guidance in textile processing, management, and utilization, and is the only source for laundry processing benchmarking data through the revolutionary LaundryMarks™ platform.

Visit ALM's website to learn more about the organization, its members, and the importance of the laundry industry.

View ALM's Hospitality Textiles page for more information and resources:

ALMnet.org/HospitalityTextiles

The Association for Linen Management
138 N. Keeneland Drive, Suite D
Richmond, KY 40475

Table of Contents

Why are “Best Practices” needed?	1
Understanding Infection Prevention	2
Employee Safety	3
OSHA Resources	4
Managing Textiles in Guest Rooms	4
Microfiber Products	5
Employee Clothing	5
Separation of Tasks	5
Process Separation	6
Management Considerations	6
Managing Textiles in the Laundry	6
Disinfection by Chemicals/Heat	7
Preventive Maintenance	7
Communication Essentials	8
With Your Guests	8
With Your Contracted Laundry Service Provider	8
Conclusion	8

Why are “Best Practices” needed?

In these challenging times, hotel guests want assurance that hotels are taking the necessary precautions to ensure their safety. This is particularly true in the case of textiles because nothing is more personal to each guest than the linens on which they sleep, their bath, spa, and pool towels, and the table linens they use when eating at on-premise food outlets or, where available, from room service. In fact, a recent survey undertaken on behalf of the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) notes that frequent travelers cite cleanliness as the most important factor when determining their next hotel stay, with 81% of travelers saying that they prefer to stay at properties that have implemented enhanced protocols and standards.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association for Linen Management (ALM) has fielded hundreds of questions from the hospitality industry surrounding issues related to hotel textiles, as well as the safety of laundry and housekeeping employees, and how to communicate enhanced cleaning efforts to guests. Those who have contacted us represent a broad spectrum of hotel management including General Managers, Directors of Rooms, Directors of Housekeeping, and Laundry Managers, just to name a few.

In recognition of the extraordinary challenges being faced by those responsible for making decisions and implementing new processes and procedures during these unprecedented times, we assembled a task force of ALM members and subject matter experts with specific experience in hospitality laundries. Our goal has been to provide best practices for the collection, processing, and replenishment of hospitality textiles during and following the global pandemic, with an eye toward guest assurance of cleanliness while minimizing employee occupational exposure.

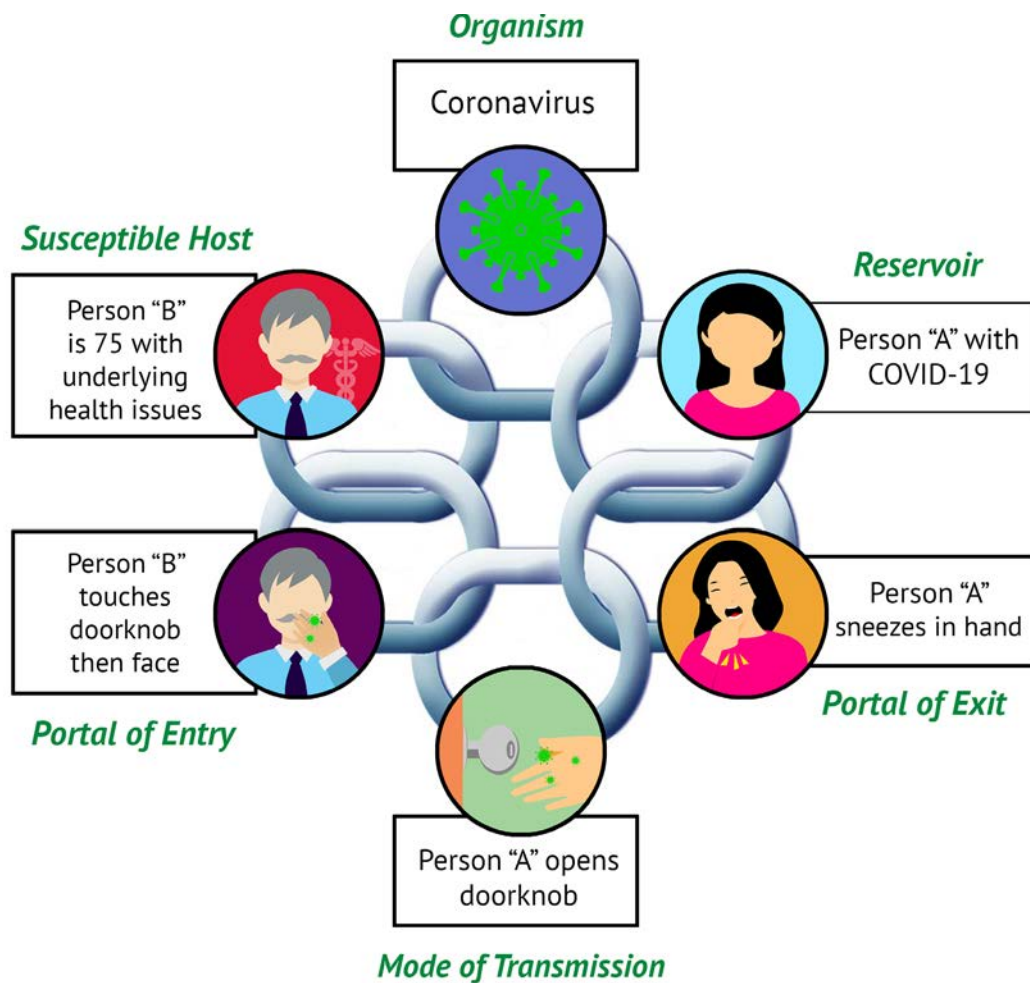
It is for these reasons that ALM has worked alongside AHLA on its Safe Stay Guidelines, and why we have produced this more detailed guidance for hotel management. While no single document can provide a complete education on these topics, we have endeavored to provide decision makers with the most important general guidance during the pandemic, including links to additional information sources from authorities when possible, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and OSHA. Additional education resources can be found on ALM’s website, including publications, webinars, schools, conferences, our online forum, and through interaction with staff and with our operator and vendor members.

Note: For the purposes of this document, any linen that has been used, soiled, or inside an occupied guest room shall be considered soiled and will be referred to as such.

Understanding Infection Prevention

To make informed, reasonable, and prudent decisions, it is critical for hotel management to first understand a little about infection prevention. While some have advocated treating hotel rooms and textiles in a similar manner to the healthcare industry, this is neither prudent nor necessary. That said, the traveling public's reasonable concerns about the spread of COVID-19 provide an opportunity to enhance previous hotel practice.

To do so, it is important to introduce the concept of The Chain of Infection, as shown in the following graphic. It is well-established that for an individual to become infected by a pathogen, all links in the chain must occur. Therefore, it follows that the spread of infection can be interrupted by breaking just one of the links in the chain. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the virus that causes COVID-19, "most commonly spreads between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet, or 2 arm lengths)," also called *direct contact*. However, for demonstration purposes, the graphic below follows the chain of infection as spread through *indirect contact*.



As you can see, there are opportunities to prevent infection at multiple points in the Chain of Infection. A few examples include:

- If person "A" felt ill, they could/should have remained at home.
- If person "A" covered their sneeze or cough with a tissue, sneezed into their elbow, or wore a face covering, the pathogen would not have been on their hand.
- If person "B" had not touched their face with unclean hands.

There were additional opportunities to prevent the spread: if tissues and a trash can had been available for person "A" when they sneezed, if hand sanitizer was within reach after the sneeze, or if hand sanitizer had been available after person "B" opened the door, prior to touching their face.

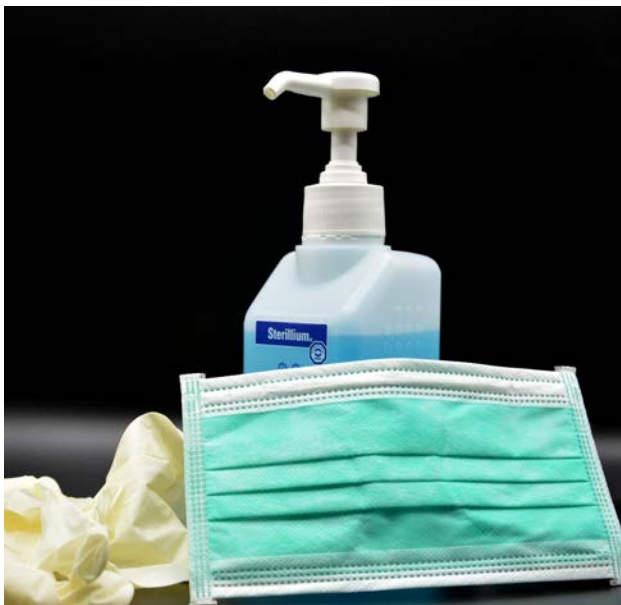
The most important thing to keep in mind is the actions and vigilance of hotel management, staff, and guests can break the chain of infection and keep everyone safe from COVID-19 and other pathogens.

Employee Safety

The [OSHA General Duty Clause](#) directs an employer to protect employees from known risks to their safety. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this includes considerations and training provisions about infection control and prevention practices. It also includes adjustments in staffing assignments and production processes to allow for social distancing and additional time for essential hand hygiene. Management should evaluate the workplace and identify tasks or situations where workers cannot maintain social distancing protocols; OSHA's [Hazard Assessment](#) is an excellent plan to follow during COVID-19.

OSHA reminds us that [engineering controls](#) are favored over personal protective equipment (PPE) in controlling employee exposure in the workplace, as these devices and methods are designed to remove/eliminate the hazard before potential worker exposure.

That said, numerous healthcare sources, including the CDC and the [Mayo Clinic](#), point to increasing evidence that wearing masks, combined with other preventive measures, such as frequent handwashing and social distancing, helps to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like COVID-19. In cases where physical distancing is impossible or where engineering controls are not available, especially in enclosed indoor spaces, management must ensure that employees wear masks. According to the [most-updated guidance from the CDC](#), COVID-19 can be spread by an infected individual, even one who is asymptomatic, who was within 6 feet of others for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. As a result, masks are strongly recommended for all workers.



In addition to engineering controls and the use of masks in the workplace, additional safety measures for personnel handling linens should include:

- Handwashing before entering and after exiting a guest room. Hands should be washed in observance of [CDC guidelines](#), meaning the use of warm or cold water, scrubbing with soap for at least 20 seconds, and then adequately rinsing hands before drying with a clean towel.
- Sanitizing hands when soap and water are not available. In this case, everyone must use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Keep in mind that soap and water are required when obvious dirt or soil are present on your hands.
- In properties with on-premise laundries, handwashing facilities and/or adequate supply of hand sanitizer must always be provided in close proximity to soiled linen work areas. Employees should be instructed to wash or sanitize their hands each time they leave a soiled linen work area and/or prior to working with clean linen. Even managers and supervisors must also wash or sanitize hands when going from a soiled linen area to a clean linen area.
- For personnel collecting soiled textiles from guest rooms, we *recommend* use of disposable gloves and a mask. For employees handling soiled linen within an on-premise laundry, we *recommend* using PPE that includes, but is not necessarily limited to, disposable gloves, mask, and a barrier garment.
- Additional handling procedures for collection of soiled textiles inside a guest room:
 - o Refrain from shaking, tossing, or agitating textile products.
 - o Place textile products inside a bag, or otherwise contain them (e.g. in a washable collection device or cart), prior to leaving the guest room.
 - o Close collection bags and/or tightly cover collection devices when transporting items through public areas of the property, including hallways, elevators, and other common areas.
 - o Avoid placing soiled textiles on the floor to avoid cross-contamination.
 - o Carts should be made of materials that allow them to be washed and disinfected (canvas is not suitable). Such cleaning must be done prior to using the carts to transport or otherwise contain clean textile products and cleaning must be carried out according to the cleaning product manufacturer instructions.

Use of [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) is to be the last line of defense. OSHA requires that PPE must be provided to staff at no cost to the employee and should always be readily available and accessible (not in a locked closet requiring supervisor access). Improper use, storage, or disposal of PPE may result in cross-contamination, possibly endangering the health of staff/guests and may require additional training.

Due to COVID-19, many hotels have made changes in the cleaning products and chemicals used. Proper selection can best be guided by the [EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). With these additional measures, attention should be given to ensure that current safety data sheets (SDS) are obtained and accessible.

OSHA Resources

OSHA maintains a [web page with excellent resources and essential training topics](#) specifically related to COVID-19 that includes topics of interest to management and employees. Among some of the essential training topics are:

- [The Chain of Infection](#)
- [The Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Employer Information for Hotels, Resorts, and Lodges](#)
- The role of PPE - proper procedures for donning and removal to avoid employee exposure/cross contamination and where PPE is stored/maintained on property
- [Measures for Safe and Effective Disinfectant Use](#)
- The essential role of communication including [potential exposure, onset of symptoms](#), and changes in hotel practice due to the COVID-19 concerns.
- Job [duties that place hotel employees handling textiles at risk](#) and how to minimize/avoid their exposure.

Managing Textiles in Guest Rooms

While there are an increasing number of studies on the topic of how long SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, remains viable on hard or soft surfaces, the evidence is still inconclusive. However, given the inability to ascertain whether a stain or other evidence of soil on a textile contains a virus, much less how long it has been there, the best practice would be to treat soiled textiles or those that have been inside an occupied guest room as containing potentially infectious organisms. OSHA refers to this practice as observing [Universal Precautions](#).

In addition to observing universal precautions and the aforementioned safety measures for personnel handling linens, the following additional textile handling measures will aid with assuring guests the hotel is dedicated to incorporating measures to keep everyone safe:

- Decorative textile products and items that are not easily cleaned between guest stays should be removed from the room. This might include decorative pillows, bedspreads, luxury robes, etc. All textiles remaining in the room after guest departure should be removed for processing.
- Wherever possible, to prevent cross-contamination and/or the spread of potential pathogens, we recommend that properties discontinue the use of soiled linen chutes. These chutes should be locked, or access should be otherwise restricted.
- Avoid using guest elevators for the transportation of both soiled and clean textiles.
- Clean linens intended for guest use should not be exposed to housekeeping carts. We suggest designating specific linen replenishment carts used solely for that purpose.
- If the hotel has eliminated room cleaning services while guests are in residence, provide instructions for how they should exchange soiled textiles for clean products during their stay. One option is to provide a plastic bag for the guest to bag soiled towels, asking them to place it outside their room for collection by room attendants. Then an even exchange can be provided with a replacement bag for future use.
- Clean linen carts that cannot be secured behind a lockable, closed door should be covered to avoid handling and potential soiling of these products by passing individuals.

We recognize that every property brand has its own standards for room replenishment, but in consideration of the precautions being taken to ensure the safety of guests and employees, brand standards may need to be modified for the duration of the pandemic to reduce the use and replenishment of unnecessary additional textiles in each guest room.



Microfiber Products

Microfiber cleaning products, including mops, are an excellent choice for hard surface cleaning of guest rooms, as they remove contaminants by attracting and containing surface particles rather than spreading them on the surface. Use of multi-colored cleaning cloths will aid in preventing cross-contamination by designating specific color cloths for the separate spaces to be cleaned. For example, for cleaning living/sleeping areas, you could designate yellow microfiber cloths. For the restroom, use blue microfiber cloths. During COVID-19, obtain a clean cloth for each guest room. Give special attention to avoid cross-contamination by adopting the cleaning method used in hospitals. Microfibers unique cleaning properties are maintained by washing them separate from other non-microfiber products. For ease in laundry processing, it is prudent to place these products in a separate bag only containing microfiber products.

Employee Clothing

Employees collecting soiled textiles from guest rooms need to take measures to avoid contaminating their personal clothing, as this may result in unintentional cross-contamination when handling clean linen. Management may want to consider options for managing the concern, such as:

- Train and support employee practices that avoid soiled linens encountering staff uniforms or personal clothing.
- Provide uniforms/scrubs for use on the job. Employees should change out of this apparel before returning home and these garments should be washed by the hotel's laundry.
- Use of fluid-resistant gowns/aprons (i.e. barrier garments) to protect employees handling soiled linens. These must be removed before moving onto the performance of clean tasks and properly disposed of or washed before reuse.
- Adopting the practice of using gloves when handling soiled textiles is an excellent measure. Gloves must be removed and placed in a trash receptacle when completing a task with soiled textiles and before moving to a cleaned area/task.
 - o Do not touch your face with your gloved hand.
 - o When removing gloves – wash your hands with soap and water or at least an appropriate alcohol hand sanitizer. Gloves are not impermeable – contaminants can pass through them.

Separation of Tasks

One option to ease the challenges related to cross-contamination is to separate the assignment of “dirty” and “clean” tasks. Separating tasks in this manner would allow staff to focus on one side of the task and limit chances of clean textiles and surfaces coming in contact with dirty items and/or cross contamination from the staff themselves.

“Dirty” Tasks

- Removal of trash from room
- Removal of dishes from room
- Removal of textiles from room
- Removal of damaged items from room
- Cleaning up spills, gross amounts of soil
- Application of cleaners and disinfectants in bathroom. Please note: We advise this is done early enough in the overall process so that any dwell time required by disinfectants can be met while other tasks are being completed.

“Clean” Tasks

- Final rinsing/wiping of restroom area (new cleaning cloth should be used)
- Placing clean textiles in room
- Making of bed (could also depend on new/continuing guest stay)
- Cleaning and disinfection (as applicable) to high touch surfaces in living area
- Vacuuming/floor cleaning in living area
- Application of air care products, if applicable

Managing Textiles in the Laundry

Laundering textiles for the hospitality industry is considerably different from the way we wash and dry our clothes, towels, and linens at home. It is a profession and, as such, is covered in great detail in books, periodicals, industry conferences, and training schools. This document is therefore intended to point out only those specific areas in which laundering, and the handling of laundered items should be given extra consideration during this pandemic.

Process Separation

An ideal laundry design would include physically separate areas for the sorting and storage of soiled textiles, for washing textiles, and for finishing, folding, and storing clean textiles. Designs like this help to ensure against the potential contamination of clean linen by soiled linen. However, since some on-premise hospitality laundries were not designed to include such physical separation, in this situation, the concept of “functional separation” for soiled and clean textiles is used.

The key to achieving functional separation is to segregate the processing of soiled and clean textiles as much as possible both physically/by distance and in time, to cleaning surfaces between processes, to prevent soiled textiles from being present in the open at the same time as clean textiles, and to monitor and dictate the flow of textile products through the space to seamlessly track the entire process of textiles from soiled to clean while avoiding the intersection of the two. These methods are used to avoid cross-contamination.

In smaller properties, especially economy, moderately-priced, and extended-stay locations, hotel laundries often exist in a single room without physical or functional separation. In these cases, management must consider how to create such separation. Some ideas might include performing certain tasks in a separate room, storing clean textiles elsewhere after processing, the use of plastic sheeting and/or air flow from clean areas to soiled areas, or additional other measures to help mitigate against the possibility of contaminating clean textiles in the laundry room. Earlier in the pandemic ALM was asked to provide guidance to properties housing healthcare workers, and the [resulting guide](#) may be useful in assisting management in coming up with innovative ways of providing some separation and contamination mitigating measures.

As we mentioned in our discussion of handling soiled textiles in guest rooms, one of the most critical control points in ensuring against the potential spread of pathogens in the laundry, is in the areas where staff handle soiled textiles. In addition to proper hand hygiene and the possible use of PPE, it is important to limit unnecessary agitation of the textiles to help avoid dispersal of any particles or pathogens on them. One way to do this is to avoid, as much as possible, any practice that involves tossing or throwing textiles into containers, washers, dryers, etc. It is also important to keep all bags of soiled textiles as tightly closed as possible, and to cover all laundry carts when their contents are not being actively in use.

Management Considerations

Regardless of the method used to prevent cross-contamination of textiles, the safety of workers in laundries must be the most important value considered, and therefore management must take all steps to assure appropriate physical distancing between laundry workers. Depending upon available space, staffing, and textile demand, the following are some options that can be considered:

- Scheduling – Consider staggering or splitting shifts or adding additional shifts to allow for fewer people in the laundry at a given time.
- Procedural Changes – Consider times and/or places where staff tend to congregate as there may be temporary measures to avoid these situations without compromising employee safety.
 - o In lieu of all-employee meetings or start-of-shift meetings, consider smaller sub-department meetings, making overhead announcements, or posting written information for staff.
 - o Adjust and/or split-up break times or rearrange break rooms to allow for better distancing and fewer staff in the area at the same time.
 - o Assess your operations clocking in/out process and any other opportunity where better social distancing can be encouraged.
 - o Spacing of staff at workstations – It may take some creativity on the part leadership to find opportunities to better distance staff from each other. Perhaps limit the number of staff in any given area at a time.



Disinfection by Chemicals/ Heat

It may be useful for hospitality launderers to know that the CDC recognizes chemical disinfection and thermal disinfection as options for the disinfection of textiles in healthcare environments; even in the pre-COVID world. The former is the careful selection of appropriate wash chemicals approved by the EPA as disinfectants, and the latter is the use of heat in the wash process to disinfect textiles. As previously, while the concern for disinfection in hospitals is significantly greater than in hotels, these same or similar techniques can be used to guide the processing of textiles in hotel laundries. While it is outside the scope of this document to provide specific guidance for each situation, we strongly suggest that every hotel laundry consult with their chosen wash chemical provider to ensure that wash formulas are appropriate to assure guests and staff that any potential pathogens, such as the SARS-CoV-2 virus, are eliminating during the laundering process.

Preventive Maintenance

The only way to ensure that processes are functioning as desired is to make sure that all laundry equipment is and has been properly maintained. As with all equipment and systems within a hotel, laundry equipment should be maintained according to a documented preventive maintenance program that includes management controls to ensure compliance. Some manufacturers have begun to provide specific hardware and software solutions for equipment monitoring to ensure above-standard performance, particularly in infection prevention and control.

As part of the preventive maintenance program, and particularly to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection of textiles, washroom machinery should be inspected on a regular basis to ensure that water meters, temperature sensors, and level gauges are operating properly and within acceptable tolerances.

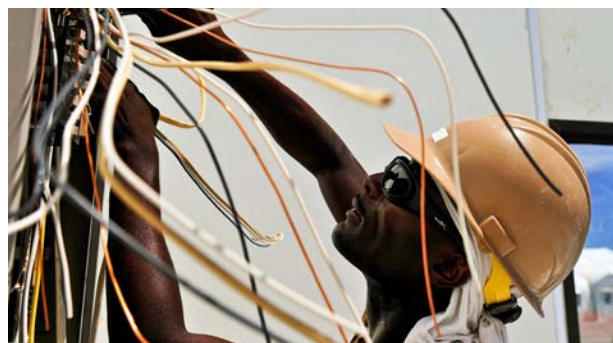
The hotel's chemical vendor should visit the facility on a regular basis to ensure that the formulas for proper disinfection and hygiene are operating within tolerances. This includes monitoring temperatures, accurate delivery of chemicals, titrations, pH, and all other factors that affect wash quality and cleanliness, and the chemical vendor should leave behind a written report, verifying and documenting achieved results.

In cases where transfer or shuttle conveyors are used to convey clean textiles from the washroom to the dryer and/or finishing areas, these conveyors must be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis, and management must ensure that there is no mixing of textile classifications on the conveyor.

Dryer machinery should also be checked based on the manufacturer's suggested frequency to ensure proper air flow (incoming and exhaust – by testing back pressure with a manometer), and to ensure that temperature sensors (typically thermocouples) and humidity sensors are operating properly. In addition, inspections must be made of all basket seals, door seals, wipers, burners, steam chests, exhaust ducts, lint collectors to ensure that all are in good condition and operating properly within acceptable tolerances. If deficiencies are noted the manufacturer/or experts should be contacted for appropriate calibration or adjustment. The maintenance team must also check dryer formulas on a regular basis to ensure that optimal dry times and temperatures are being used for each classification of textiles being processed.

Flatwork finishing equipment must be tested on a regular basis to ensure the proper operation of temperature sensors, chest/roll pressure sensors, speed sensors, exhaust duct pressure sensors, roll lifting cylinders, feeders, and folders.

Written logs of all equipment formulas and settings used should be kept for a minimum of 90 days, especially in cases where washer formulas and dryer/folder settings are manually selected by team members. Management must spot check on a regular basis to ensure that the proper formulas/settings have been selected by team members.



Communication Essentials

With Your Guests

Communication to the guests is critical. All hotel employees should be able to answer guest questions. We have provided hotel management and laundry managers information to be as safe as possible and assure guests are provided with a safe and comfortable environment.

We encourage each property to provide these points to guests:

- How to request linen previously provided in the room, but removed due to COVID-19 (i.e. robes, alternate pillows, additional bedding for pull-outs, etc.)
- What to do with dirty linen and how to get linen replenished/replaced.
- Explain how their textiles are safe for their use.
- Why there are less linens in their room than typical.
- Inform guests their textiles have been professionally processed to provide them with a clean and comfortable environment.
- Say what you will do and do what you say, to provide guests with clear expectations during their stay and to secure the confidence in your property/brands.

With Your Contracted Laundry Service Provider

Your laundry service provider is facing similar staffing, cleaning, and safety issues as you. Be especially mindful to remain in touch with your contact/customer service representative at the laundry to keep them apprised of expected fluctuations in textiles, changes to schedules, and changes in product use.

- Regarding reduction in census or hotel closure.
- Change in products processed.
 - o Adding apparel/scrubs for staff.
 - o Removal of duvets and/or robes.
 - o Closing pool area – no pool towels.
 - o Reduction in food and beverage due to state occupancy limits.
- Reopening plans; assess how far out.

Hotels should communicate closely with their laundry processor. They may be able to provide you with a statement or assurances as to their processing standards to ensure guests of a clean and comfortable environment.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is new to us all, and we are constantly learning and adapting practice to get us back to business as usual. Realize that the professionals at your on-site hotel laundry and your contracted laundry service provider have been working with a multitude of professionals, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that proper laundry procedures provide for a safe stay.

These laundries are not like your laundry at home. Time tested and proven measures are taken to ensure that that practice continues in this unprecedented time. Do not discard/trash any reusable textiles. And continued communication with your laundry service professional will help to get us through these times together.