

FIRE SAFETY IN HOTELS

In the event of a fire in a hotel quick and proper action by the desk clerk can save lives and contribute to rapid control of the fire.

A hotel is frequently a highly complex building containing a variety of functions including restaurants, meeting rooms, shops, laundry, housekeeping and offices in addition to guest quarters. These diverse activities can result in numerous potential sources of fire. The presence of hotel guests and their visitors results in a building largely populated by strangers who are not familiar with their surroundings.

The hotel staff, which is familiar with the building and its operation, has a basic responsibility to the hotel guests to act quickly in the event of a fire. A fire can occur at anytime, anywhere in a hotel. Frequently, the desk clerk will be the first staff member to become aware of a fire. This is especially likely to happen at night when a guest may contact the hotel desk clerk to report a fire.

For these reasons, the Municipal Code of Chicago makes specific requirements related to the duties of desk clerks with respect to fire safety.

DESK CLERK CERTIFICATION

Chapter 90 of the Municipal Code of Chicago requires that any hotel with accommodations for 20 or more guests provide desk clerks on duty continuously at all times that the building is open and occupied by the public. Per Municipal Ordinance, a desk clerk is required to be certified by the Bureau of Fire Prevention of the Chicago Fire Department.

To be a certified desk clerk, a person must:

- Be at least 18 years of age and of good moral character.
- Be able to speak the English language.
- Produce evidence of employment or residence for the previous two (2) years.
- Pass an examination of fire safety.

Individuals who have had their desk clerk certification revoked are not eligible for re-certification.

DUTIES OF THE DESK CLERK

It is the daily duty of the desk clerk to see that exit doors are unlocked and unobstructed and that corridors and fire escapes are free from obstructions. It is also the desk clerk's duty to see that all fire equipment such as fire extinguishers are inspected regularly and serviced by a licensed service person every year. The desk clerk must also ensure that the standpipe hose, fire detectors and the fire alarm panel are in place and in proper working order.

By law, in the event of a fire, it is the duty of the desk clerk to immediately call the Fire Department (9-1-1) and then begin to notify the occupants of the hotel. The Fire Department should be called as soon as there is any indication of fire. Any report of a possible fire made by any occupant or employee, such as an odor of smoke, should be treated as an actual fire. When calling the Fire Department, the desk clerk should state the hotel's name and address and the floor on which the fire has been reported. A desk clerk should not attempt to investigate a reported fire before calling the Fire Department.

If a guest reports a fire to the hotel switchboard by telephone, the desk clerk should obtain the room number and instruct the guest to leave the room and close the door behind him to prevent the spread of smoke and fire into the corridor. After calling the Fire Department, notify hotel occupants.

A desk clerk is not the only hotel employee who can call the Fire Department. Any employee who

discovers a fire should immediately call 9-1-1.

NO ATTEMPT SHOULD BE MADE TO FIGHT THE FIRE UNTIL THE CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN CALLED AND THE OCCUPANTS NOTIFIED

MONTHLY REPORTS

Certified desk clerks are required to complete a monthly report. The monthly report is to be completed in duplicate and signed by the desk clerk and his or her immediate superior. The original report is to be forwarded to the Fire Prevention Bureau at 444 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, IL 60610, before the fifth day of each month. A copy of the report shall be forwarded to the owner or manager of the hotel. Forms can be obtained from the Chicago Fire Prevention Bureau.