



California Applicants' Attorneys Association
Affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters
UNITE HERE

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OFF OUR KNEES:

**Hotel Housekeepers Win CalOSHA Citation and Sen.
Appropriations Support to End “On Your Knees” Bathroom
Cleaning and Backbreaking Bed-Making Practices**
*CalOSHA citation, committee approval Boost De León Bill to End
“Modern Short-Handled Hoe”*

SACRAMENTO, CA - The California Applicants' Attorneys Association (CAAA) and UNITE HERE today said that an OSHA citation and Senate Appropriations Committee approval of SB 432 (De León) will help propel their efforts to outlaw housekeeping practices that result in housekeepers cleaning bathroom floors on their knees and lifting heavy mattresses for lack of fitted sheets. The California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CalOSHA) has issued citations alleging that the Hyatt Andaz Hotel in West Hollywood has failed to comply with multiple state safety regulations. The State Senate Appropriations Committee approved the measure Thursday on a 6 to 3 vote. The bill will be heard on the State Senate Floor next week.

Hotel housekeepers frequently clean bathroom floors on their hands and knees, an unsafe and degrading practice that is tolerated by too many hotel employers. This practice, combined with the failure to provide fitted sheets like those used in homes, has led to an unacceptable rate of back and other work-related injuries. A landmark study reported in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine (2009) by a team of researchers from four universities and UNITE HERE found that hotel housekeepers, particularly females, had the highest injury rates of any hotel service workers in the study. Female housekeepers, especially Hispanic women, had the highest risk of injury. Hispanic women were almost twice as likely to be injured as white housekeepers.

The California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CalOSHA) has issued citations alleging that the Hyatt Andaz Hotel in West Hollywood has failed to comply with multiple state safety regulations. CalOSHA also highlighted concerns about repetitive motion injuries to housekeepers owing to potential hazards arising from the tasks of bed making and floor cleaning.

In an information memo issued to the Hyatt Andaz on May 20, CalOSHA identified instances of housekeepers who suffered medically diagnosed repetitive motion injuries while making beds and cleaning bathroom floors on hands and knees.

The agency said the hotel should consider using fitted sheets and tools, among other measures, to prevent repetitive motion injuries to housekeepers.

CalOSHA put the Hyatt Andaz on notice, warning that if it fails to remedy these potentially hazardous conditions and workers become injured in the future, CalOSHA may issue citations. The agency advised that such citations could be classified as 'willful,' which is a more severe type of citation with potentially stiffer penalties.

The hazard memo – the first of its kind for hotels in California and nationwide – comes as state legislators weigh a proposed bill requiring hotels to provide long-handled tools and fitted sheets to prevent housekeeper injuries. The full Senate will vote on the legislation, SB 432 (D-De Leon), next week.

“Working as a housekeeper for 14 years has taken a toll on my body. When I injured my back making a bed, I was on medication for months,” said Morena Hernandez, a Hyatt Andaz housekeeper. “I hope CalOSHA’s recommendation for fitted sheets and tools can help the hotel industry see that SB 432 can be a simple, positive way to make our jobs safer.”

CalOSHA’s citations are a result of investigations following injury complaints lodged by Hyatt housekeepers in November 2010. In total, CalOSHA proposed \$7,000 in fines against the Hyatt Andaz for various alleged safety violations found in the hotel.

SB 432 is designed to eliminate the very hazards that are the subject of CalOSHA’s information memo – injuries housekeepers endure from cleaning bathroom floors on their knees and lifting heavy mattresses repeatedly for lack of fitted sheets. The bill’s sponsor, the California Applicants Attorneys Association, intends to amend the bill in the Assembly to clarify that the law will be enforced with existing OSHA staff, meaning no additional costs to the state. Another amendment will make clear that if a hotel can introduce a better ergonomic remedy to reduce housekeeper injury, it will be allowed to apply for a variance from the bill’s requirements.

The Hyatt has 15 working days to pay the \$7,000 in proposed penalties or file an appeal.

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