

Hotel cleaning services

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“I wouldn’t walk around barefoot in the room”

A report by trade union Unia has revealed that hotel housekeepers at a Zurich hotel work in poor conditions – a claim the manager rejects.

Hotel cleaning is not an easy industry. Major chains like Marriott previously outsourced cleaning in their hotels to external companies. Some cleaning companies give contracts like these a wide berth, while smaller companies try to hold their own amongst the fierce competition.

This can result in unrealistic room-cleaning times or too few staff for too much work. And, according to a report by Unia Zürich-Schaffhausen, the housekeepers at Zurich’s Marriott hotels consequently work in questionable conditions.

Toxic cleaning agents

“We’re supposed to clean everything with the same cleaning agent.

And this cleaning agent is toxic”, a supposed cleaner from the Sheraton Hotel Zürich West told the union, adding that the wooden floors and furniture are cleaned with the same cleaning agent that is intended for the bath and is supposed to be rinsed off with lots of water. “I wouldn’t walk around barefoot in that hotel room.”

According to Unia, the reason for these bad conditions in cleaning companies lies in the hotel industry because the business has changed dramatically. There are new business models, a lack of contact between owners and operators, and “consistent outsourcing”, which all create a situation where time constraints and pressure to make savings are part of the daily norm.

Unfounded accusations

The skilled workers notice this themselves. “Stress and breaches of collective employment contracts” are the order of the day, Unia writes in its report. “A few months ago, I had an ear problem that was causing me intense pain”, says another cleaner. “I kept working despite the pain and taking strong antibiotics.”

Mauro Cerutti, manager of the Sheraton Zürich and Sheraton Neues Schloss, which are part of the Marriott chain, denies the allegations. “I was astounded by this report”, says Cerutti.

He claims the accusations are unfounded. “Our housekeepers are instructed to use different cleaning agents for different tasks”, he says, adding that the notion that rooms have to be all done and cleaned in 10 minutes is “nonsense.”

“I am aware that housekeepers have the toughest job”, he continues, “which is why we constantly conduct performance appraisal interviews and I have always been assured that everything was fine.”