

Insider dishes the dirt on the cleaning debacle

Source: Blick

Author: Patrik Berger and Ulrich Rotzinger Publication date: 09.07.2018

But hotel bosses don't see any problem

ZURICH – The Hotelleriesuisse association firmly believes the industry does not have a cleanliness problem. But that's not true, says an insider, who has behind-the-scenes access to Switzerland's cleaning firms.

At Swiss hotels, not everything that glitters is clean, especially not at the best addresses in Zurich, such as the five-star Renaissance or four-star Sheraton hotel. Former hotel housekeepers told BLICK

that time constraints meant they could only perform very quick, superficial cleaning, wiping toothbrush glasses with cloths used to clean toilets.

Yesterday's report sparked enquiries at Hotelleriesuisse, the association confirmed. The umbrella organisation represents some 2000 of Switzerland's nearly 5000 hotels, accounting for 75 percent of overnight stays.

No cleanliness problem?

"The industry does not have a cleanliness problem", Patrick Schönberg, a member of the Hotelleriesuisse management board, told BLICK. He says room hygiene is not a specific issue. Although he cannot back up his statements with concrete evidence, he claims the association's legal consultants have not received any cleanliness-related enquiries.

What has increased, he continues, is the number of reports of piles of rubbish and other mess left behind by hotel guests in their rooms. "But we can't talk of a trend as such", says Schönberg, who speculates that greater volumes of rubbish in rooms are most likely due to the shift in values towards a throw-away society – an on-the-go salad from a convenience store here, a takeaway burger meal there, and it's all brought back to the hotel room.

"Dirty vacuum cleaners with broken cables"

Sandra Burri (45) disagrees with Hotelleriesuisse's Schönberg. The housekeeping instructor at the Thun Hotel Management School has behind-the-scenes access to the Swiss hotel industry, and she is constantly faced with less than appetising sights, such as "dirty old vacuum cleaners with broken cables and grubby cleaning trolleys with dirty cloths." It's not something guests would want to see, she says. "Bathrooms should not be grimy, and beds should not be grubby – whether it's a one-star or five-star property."

Burri warns that "dirty bedding and towels should not be piled in the corridors either. They should be placed in the laundry trolleys in the room", adding that there is also room for improvement in cleaning staff's manner. These days, she says, guests should be able to expect a friendly "hello" or "do you need anything?".

Not just anyone can be a housekeeper

According to Burri, there are major differences in the approach to hygiene among management. “For many hoteliers, cleanliness does not take top priority, and this is reflected in the way the rooms look.” The instructor knows this full well from her daily work. The managers think anyone can be a cleaner, but, says Burri, this is a disastrous attitude.

“The work these days is very complex; there are harmful cleaning agents. Many people also lack knowledge when it comes to treating surfaces”, she says. “Foreign workers in particular often do not have this expertise.”

She backs up BLICK’s findings that one of the key problems is outsourcing work to subcontractors. “This makes it harder to monitor quality. Hoteliers don’t know who is actually doing the cleaning.” It’s a way for hotels to reduce their costs. “It’s like in construction; the cheapest bidder gets the contract. That is a short-term profit-oriented mind-set.”