A fundamental principle of crisis management is to be proactive—anticipate impacts on your hotel, cruise ship, restaurant, casino, or other venue and look ahead. Marsh recommends the following actions be taken to minimize the impact of a bedbug incident on your organization.

**Before It Happens – Put a Plan in Place**

**Review existing plans and procedures.** Ensure you have a corporate-level crisis management plan in place as well as response plans at individual properties. Review existing procedures/establish new procedures related to identifying, reporting, and responding to a bedbug infestation; ensure these procedures are aligned with overarching plan concepts.

**Train employees on how to identify and respond to a potential or actual infestation.** Your plans are only as good as your best trained employees. Make sure everyone from management to housekeeping understands the warning signs and what do to if they suspect a problem. Ensure they are familiar with updated company procedures.

**Establish relevant policies.** For example, consider suspending any non-refundable room cancellation penalties until the infestation is over. Goodwill toward your guests who are members of frequent guest programs, tour groups, and individual travelers will help build/sustain your reputation. If staffing needs change due to temporary closures, decide how/if employees will be compensated for lost days.

**Define Your Strategy**

**Assemble your corporate-level Crisis Management Team (CMT) and define your strategy to respond and recover.** The CMT should include cross-functional representatives from across your organization, e.g., operations, guest services, housekeeping, engineering, communications, legal, etc., to aid in decision-making. This group is responsible for defining your strategy to manage all related issues and returning to business as normal as quickly as possible. The CMT will also play a critical role in defining and selecting response actions.

**Begin to forecast potential business and reputation consequences.** Understanding the potential impacts of a crisis before they happen is critical to proactively managing an adverse event or issue. The CMT should not only understand consequences today, but also look ahead and define potential impacts to the business in the future. This could include everything from lost convention or meeting contracts to labor issues with employees if the hotel or a significant part of it, for example, must be closed temporarily.

**Develop your communications strategy.** Think about communications as it relates to all stakeholders—employees, guests, shareholders, the media, social media, etc. Ensure your communications reflect the company’s overarching strategy as defined by your CMT. Use a variety of vehicles and tactics to ensure your message is heard, from a media statement, employee outreach, and letters to hotel guests. Explain what has been done/is being done to address the issue and help prevent it in the future. Use this as an opportunity to educate individuals on what they can do to protect themselves and their homes.
Select Appropriate Response Tactics

Call in a reputable exterminator immediately. Close any rooms where pests have been found and take them off of the available inventory. Hotel operations may want to have extermination work done during the day as soon as the normal check out cycle begins (8:00 am) and completed before normal check in begins (3:00 pm). Restaurants or other venues may want to have extermination work done after hours. While extermination services are commonplace and expected in hospitality operations, trucks should be parked at the back of the buildings away from public view. Plan follow-up visits and monitor the situation closely—letting employees, customers, and guests who may have been moved to a new room, and others, know that you are taking this seriously and will continue to be vigilant.

Respond immediately to local health department inquiries or inspections. Managers should escort health department inspectors and take notes on all findings. Communicate and coordinate the extermination, cleaning, and soft goods replacement process as needed.

Be proactive and contact event coordinators immediately if rooms will be restricted. A significant infestation, especially with media attention, will require that you notify event planners and coordinate alternate and additional hotel beds and event space if needed.

Monitor the response and opinions of your stakeholders, including relevant social media. Bring any issues to the attention of the CMT and begin to define an appropriate response/recovery strategy. Work with corporate communications to ensure response actions are effectively communicated in an appropriate way to all stakeholders.

Ensure that all infested soft goods on the premises as well as mattresses, box springs, furniture, or carpets are appropriately dealt with or isolated. Planning for this ahead of time is vital so as to avoid contaminating other goods in the laundry area, storage areas, or a warehouse. If sending contaminated products to a landfill, make sure they get there—these products should be destroyed, not donated or made available for re-sale in thrift stores.

Close rooms, sections of floors or entire floors temporarily, if necessary. Use the same processes as during construction projects or when cleaning storm damage or pipe breaks. Signs should be posted at any closed locations telling customers that safety is your company’s priority, and noting the re-open date. Program guest elevators to bypass closed floors, while keeping the service elevators available for the work crews.

Employees should be posted in meeting spaces or areas that cannot be blocked.

If your hotel or restaurant is located in an airport terminal or a mall, inform the facilities management. Use facilities management as a resource to help control rumors and to address remediation efforts.

Improve Organizational Planning and Response

Share your lessons learned with your organization. The current bedbug situation has the potential to affect a wide range of hospitality locations across the globe. While your organization may have only experienced one incident to date, other locations should be made aware of how the situation was handled and any updated crisis management policies as a result.

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