

Paper Code And Title: H04FO Front Office and Housekeeping

Module Code and Name: H04FO39 Handling Emergency Situations

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Component – I

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Component-I (B) Description of Module

Items	Description of Module
Subject Name	Home Science
Paper Name	Front Office and Housekeeping
Module Name	Handling Emergency Situations
Module ID	H04FO039
Pre-requisites	Knowledge on possible threats to a hotel, different areas in the building to plan and manage an emergency.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Identify the threats to the hotel property and guests✓ Be aware of various types of emergency that occur in hotels✓ Plan and manage emergency situations with ease.✓ Understand the responsibility of housekeeping and front staffs with respect to emergency situations.
Keywords	Emergency, violence, bomb, fire, disaster, detector, threat, evacuation, escape,

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accident, first aid, theft, epidemic, vandalism, safety, security, preparedness.
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HANDLING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Any situation that poses an immediate risk to life, health, property or environment is called an emergency. Emergencies cannot be anticipated. It can occur at any time due to a number of reasons. Eg: bomb blast, fire, etc. Safety should be the first priority when handling emergency cases. Hence, the hotels must ensure reasonable care for guest and employee safety.

This module will help the student to understand the various emergency situations arising in a hospitality industry and will help to plan a well thought emergency action plan prior to any unexpected situations

OBJECTIVES

After successful completion of this chapter the student should be able to:

- ✓ Identify the threats to the hotel property and guests
- ✓ Be aware of various types of emergency that occur in hotels
- ✓ Plan and manage emergency situations with ease.
- ✓ Understand the responsibility of housekeeping and front staffs with respect to emergency situations.

1. EMERGENCY AT WORKPLACE

Emergencies can be natural or man-made. It may disrupt/ shut down the operation of the organization.

Natural emergencies- floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc

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Man- made emergencies- Fires, bomb scares, toxic gas leakage, chemical spills, radiological accidents, explosions, civil disturbances and work place violence resulting in bodily harm and trauma.

Most of the time the damage is more due to panic and ignorance than the emergency itself. In order to cope with the situation and prevent or minimize the damage, the management should be prepared for them. Advance planning, training and drills need to be held in combating such situations. Hence a good action plan has to be developed by assuming the effects of potential emergencies- the means to safeguard the guests, employees and the property.

2. ACTION PLAN?

An action plan is the procedure to be developed and followed by the employers and employees to safe guard the life of guests, employees as well as the property. Any plan should be tailor made to that particular establishment. Compiling an action plan and training the employees is very essential to respond timely to emergency alarms. More you prepare more likely you are to reduce the losses and to rebuild faster after a loss. Emergency preparedness is the ability to react appropriately to a disaster. Emergency escape procedures and routes to be placed in easily accessible areas in all the floors.

3. MANAGING AN EMERGENCY

There are 4 phases to be applied in case of an emergency.

3.1 Preparedness phase- This is called as the planning phase, where you decide on how to respond to an incident. There has to be lines of command and control and also division of activities. This would avoid negative situations such as three separate agencies all starting an official [rest at the same time when a disaster occurs.](#)

3.2 Response phase/ impact phase- this phase begins at the moment when the emergency actually occurs. The prior decisions made will help to act in an easy way.

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3.3 Recovery phase/ relief phase- this phase is generally after the incident had occurred, where they assist in the clear up from the incident, or help the people involved overcome their mental trauma.

3.4 Mitigation phase/ recovery phase- this phase helps to ensure that the same incident doesn't occur again. The plans have to be updated to deal with future emergencies, and again starting from the first phase and completing the circle.

4. KEY EMERGENCY PRINCIPLE

- **Assess the situation for danger-** this should be the core to emergency management as the rescuer should not become the secondary victim of any incident.
- **Observation of the surroundings-** the cause of the accident has to be analysed and expanding outwards to find any other hazards and witnesses
- If at any time the risk from any hazard poses a significant danger (as a factor of **likelihood** and seriousness) to the rescuer, they should consider whether they should approach the scene (or get the help of appropriate agencies).

5. TYPE OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

5.1 NATURAL DISASTERS- Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, hurricanes do happen all over the world. It is important that the staff members have emergency drills in which they have to carry out a mock rescue operation.

5.2 FIRE ALARMS: Now a days most of the hotels have got smoke detectors and alarm system throughout the entire organization day and is monitored for 24 hours for all the days a week. This helps the emergency and security staff to respond immediately to the area where the help is required.

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EMERGENCY ALARMS

Alarms should be initiated during emergency situations to the staff and guests. Alarms have to be distinctive and loud enough to be heard by everyone. All staff must respond to emergency alarms and follow instructions.

1. Check for any sign of immediate danger
2. Shut down equipments/processes
3. Follow the **EXIT** signs to evacuate
4. Escort guests and those who require assistance
5. Lifts should not be used.
6. Proceed to assembly area

Do not enter a building in alarm, or re-enter the evacuated building until the "all clear" has been given.

5.3 HANDLING BOMB THREAT BY FRONT OFFICE STAFFS –

The staff receiving the phone call on bomb threat should be ready to get the following information from the person who is giving a threat. A well prepared checklist should be kept ready and available to the staffs during emergencies.

1. The phone number in which the call was received.
2. The telephone number of the caller incase the hotel had an operator board from where it can be obtained.
3. The Exact words of the person making the threat.
4. Background noises/ music such as traffic sound or any other voices nearby can be noted down.
5. Make a note on the sex of the caller and if possible the approximate age with their voice.
6. Any particular accent or familiar voice.

The staff should be alert enough to obtain the following information if the caller did not give many details- the location of the bomb, when it will explode, what does he/she needs and if

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possible the name of the caller. Then it is the duty of the employee to intimate their manager, and police officials regarding the threat and provide the complete bomb threat checklist. The above information obtained from the caller will be very helpful for the police to identify the person. The hotel management team after informing the police should immediately initiate evacuation process of the employees and guests.

EVACUATION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Only under emergency an evacuation of the building may be ordered. In some minor cases shutting off of gas, electricity or water may be instructed. For national disasters it is prudent to listen to radio/ TV/ news to keep oneself informed and follow official orders. A disorganized evacuation can result in confusion, injury and property damage or some time even death. Hence the evacuation routes and emergency escape procedures are to be placed in easily accessible areas in all the floors, which can be viewed by everyone.

- Emergency telephone numbers of individuals both within and outside the organization
- Fire extinguishers with instructions of operation.
- Alternative communication centre in case of fire/ explosion
- The escape route has to be clearly marked and well-lit
- Spacious enough to accommodate the evacuating people
- The route should not expose to additional hazards
- There should be designated assembly areas where employees can gather after evacuating
- Head count has to be taken and informed to the official in-charge of those who haven't escaped
- Providing transportation to offsite locations

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5.4 IDENTIFICATION OF SUSPICIOUS OBJECTS

The employees should not move or handle any unidentified/suspicious objects found in the premises. It should be immediately notified to the department handling emergency response with the details of the object such as the type of object, location, description, and why it is considered as a suspicious object. Establish control of the area and relocate the at risk people to better locations. Sometimes it might be the legitimate property of the guests or visitors who would have left behind without informing the hotel staffs prior to bomb threat. Hence proper check has to be made before alerting the others. If not, a quiet and systematic evacuation from the area has to be initiated. Re-entering the premises is a decision that must be made by the management after consulting the police. If the evacuation was made without a search by the trained personnel, then the premises should be searched before re-occupying the facility.

5.5 HOW TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS FROM GUEST?

Complaints will always be seen in any hospitality industry when the products/ services are being sold. Not all the customers will be satisfied about the products/ services being used as they are paying for all the services utilized. Customers might feel unhappy or get angry for various reasons (eg: bad quality food in restaurants). The basic golden rule is "Don't panic or be offensive" when guests come with complaints. Try to deal all sorts of complaints professionally. This is a good time to showcase your professionalism. No promises have to be made by the staffs to the guests that exceed their authority. Similarly, they should admit themselves if the problem cannot be solved. Thus, honesty is always the best policy when dealing with complaints from the guest. Sometimes the guests keep on complaining which might be their nature, in which case the front office staff should develop an approach for dealing with such guests.

HANDLING GUEST COMPLAINTS

Listen with concern and empathy.



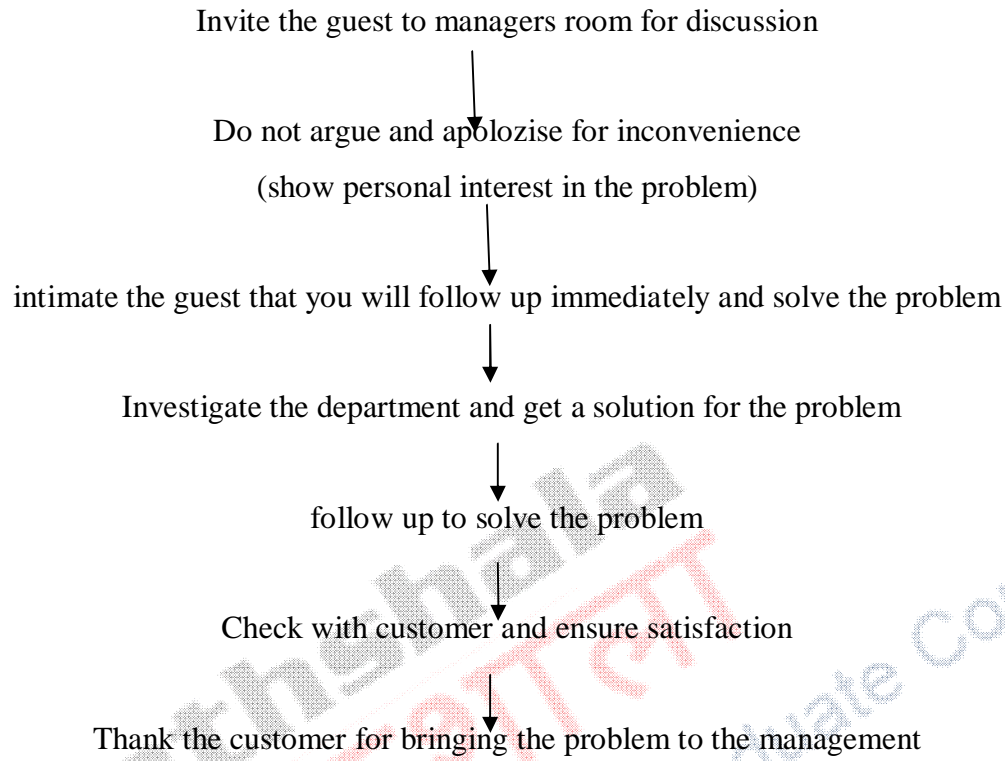
Greet and acknowledge the guest



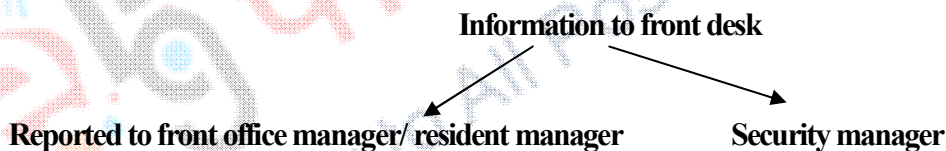
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5.6 DEATH OF A GUEST



- **Do not touch or disturb the body** before the police arrive to the spot as can be a suicide case or murder.
- The **police** should be **informed** and also the hotel **doctor should be made to arrive** who can check and confirm the death.
- The management should find the residential address of the deceased and the relatives to be immediately intimated.
- The dead body should be fully covered and removed from the room only after the permission of police stating that all the formalities are completed.
- Only the **service elevator** should be used, and not the guest elevator.

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- A document has to be prepared and maintained as to **name of the person who died, the name of informer, the time, room number, place and date of death.**
- The belongings/ luggages list of the deceased should be prepared and kept in the luggage room and have to be handed over to the relatives after their arrival to the spot.
- The room has to be **locked and sealed.**
- The room can be sold again to other customers only after obtaining **clearance certificate** from the police.

5.7 SUDDEN ACCIDENTS

Knowledge of first aid would be very helpful in situations of sudden accidents. The following things have to be taken care of when handling accident victims.

- Take the victim from the site of accident as soon as possible to a more comfortable place where there is fresh air using a stretcher in case there is a need.
- Call the physician to the site and provide him with the details of accident as to how it happened. Always have one more person along for help.
- Provide the victim with first aid by a trained personnel in case the physician is not available or take to a nearby hospital/clinic in an ambulance
- **Try to protect the establishment from any false allegation.**
- Document the details of the accident giving details such as date, time, room number and place where it occurred etc.
- Also provide the comments as to the reason for the accident and how it can be prevented or can be avoided in future.
- An accident book has to be maintained by all the organizations, which are easily accessible by the employees to note down the details. This will be very helpful for the management to take corrective actions.

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5.8 THEFT OF HOTEL PROPERTY

The theft of the properties by the employees of the hotel can be prevented by screening them before hiring into the organization. Their previous employer can be referred to or their personal information can be checked. A detailed record of the employees can be obtained and recorded. Similarly, the personnel entering the guest room and to various other departments can be recorded in a register or through webcam. No employees should be allowed to take the guest room keys out of hotel premises and should be returned to the front office while leaving the premises.

Theft of hotel property by the guest

It is very unfortunate that majority of the guests have a tendency to take away the hotel properties which are not securely fastened down, sometimes forgetfully or to have it as a remembrance (eg: towels, blankets, mats, soaps, hangers, lamps, cutlery, crockery, cup and saucers, and even plumbing fixtures). This usually happens when the guest checks out from the hotel. This pilferage for a prolonged period may cause heavy loss for the organization. If the theft appears to be done intentionally and if the housekeeping and front office is well versed with the properties in the rooms and their cost, they can ask the guest to pay compensation for the same.

Prevention of theft:

- Automatic locks on the guest room doors.
- Security officer with a good watch round the clock at regular intervals.
- Providing safety lockers for both the guests and the employees and informing them not to keep valuables in the guest room.
- Having a keen watch on walk-ins who come inside premises as if booking a room and moving away with something in their hand, than who has undergone a process of making a reservation in the hotel.
- The guest room number and mobile numbers should not be provided to visitors or to any telephone callers.
- If the guest complains of losing the key and asks the housekeeping staff to open the door, then they should be directed to the front office and the door should not be opened.

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- Master key should be kept under strict supervision and control.
- Regular vigilance around the organization.
- Always allot duties and rest period in slots such that there is always one person on duty in all the floors.
- Instruct the telephone operator not to connect calls to the guest room incase the request is made by the caller by room number. The receptionist should insist on knowing the name of the guest who the caller wishes to speak to.
- Closed circuit televisions should be used for all the areas.

5.9 SITUATION OF ILLNESS AND EPIDEMICS

When any of the guest or staff is in sick condition, it should be immediately informed to the front office staff or receptionist. The patient should be taken immediately either to the in-house physician or to the family doctor of the patient. Housekeeping staffs also need to be intimated about the sickness and instructions if any. In the case of serious sickness, the guest should be moved to a nearby hospital or nursing home. During epidemic situations the management has to take all the precautionary measures give by the health department to prevent spread of infection or spoilage of foods.

5.10 HANDLING A DRUNK GUEST

If any of the guests behave unruly after taking alcohol beyond the limit, they should be politely taken to the back office, without irritating or offending them. The staff are not supposed to argue with them and hotel security must be called off to relocate them.

5.11 VANDALISM:

The staff must call the hotel security and order the main door to be locked. If the things go beyond the level then police must be called immediately. The guest should be advised to remain inside the hotel.

Do not panic and act on unauthentic news. Discourage rumors and do not spread any information that you are not sure of yourself. Ensure security of life over property. If there is

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any damage to the property then the front office staff can charge the guest for the damage caused to the property.

5.12 Gas leaks

Many of the buildings will be installed and serviced by natural gas. This natural gas can easily be detected by odour/ smell. Natural gas will dissipate quickly in naturally ventilated areas and pose a limited risk of fire or explosion. Despite this, avoid the use of mobile phones (potential ignition source) in the immediate area.

Gas leak detected **OUTSIDE** a building

1. Alert people to move away
2. Call Security

Gas leak detected **INSIDE** a building

1. Warn anyone in immediate danger
2. Notify local emergency responders
3. Evacuate to a well ventilated external area
4. Call Security

SUMMARY

Emergencies arising are very common thing in any area or situation where people have gathered or due to natural calamity. Preparedness to handle any emergency in a tactful way with predetermined procedures as per the organisation is very essential to prevent dangers to health, life, environment or property. Saving lives needs more than just will and courage. The situation may worsen if untrained individuals involve themselves in rescue operation and may end up in hurting themselves. Hence it is generally wise to leave the rescue work to the trained, equipped and certified persons.