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Are Hotels Doing Enough to Combat Terrorism?

With the recent raising of terror levels in New York, Washington D.C. and New Jersey, and the bombing of two hotels in Istanbul, one would assume that security would be the No. 1 concern for hoteliers and making sure their guests are safe. **Sadly, however, this is not true, according to John Fannin, CEO of SafePlace, the only independent provider of safety accreditation for the lodging industry.**

In fact, even after the 9/11 attacks, the bombing of the JW Marriott in Jakarta and the nightclub bombing in Bali, Fannin believes the lodging industry is still “woefully ill prepared” for a catastrophic event. And even more disturbing, is that according to Fannin, many in the industry have expressed that guest safety and security is the government’s responsibility rather than their responsibility.

According to a recent survey of international executives done by the Institute of Management and Administration, 91% of respondents reported they have not followed through with their proposed plans to upgrade security since 9/11. This is hard to believe considering 51% of respondents at the NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference in June, considered potential terrorism attacks as the biggest threat to the industry’s full recovery.

So what can be done? Right now it would be fairly easy for a group of terrorists to check into several different rooms in a hotel with bombs in suitcases, and no one would be the wiser. Is a bomb-sniffing dog in hotel lobbies out of the question?

In today’s world, most guests would probably find that comforting as opposed to a nuisance. Is it plausible? Probably not, since there aren’t enough dogs available to cover every hotel. Nor would hotels want to foot

the bill. But Fannin believes there are many things hotels should be doing to protect guests that don't require a large capital expenditure.

One hotel that is doing it right is the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans. Hotel Executive Assistant Richard Condon, a former member of the Big Easy police department, helps head up the security for the property, which is certified by SafePlace.

While Condon believes you can't make your hotel a maximum-security prison, there are many things that can be done. Employees at the Monteleone have undergone special security training, including FBI bomb training and how to handle packages and suitcases. Packages are no longer accepted in the checkroom. Cameras are being installed—to the tune of \$60,000—in all the elevators, lobbies, entrances, exits and parking garages, part of a \$9.5M renovation. Closed-circuit TVs are being updated and will be accessible on the website. Picture ID is required at check-in, whether paying with cash or credit. The loss prevention staff has been increased and one member is always present in the lobby. Anyone found wandering the halls after midnight must show proof of being a registered guest, or they are taken downstairs to register and pay.

While Condon believes you can never do enough, he knows you have to do something and not just wait for someone else to protect you. It's a major expense, but one that must be done if for no other reason than to make your guests feel secure, which in turn could lead to return visits and more revenue to cover.