

Better Bedding Means Heavy Duty for Housekeepers

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Most hotel chains have upgraded their bedding by now. Pillowtop mattress pads. Ahh. Extra pillows. Down comforters. Plush duvet covers. Ahh. Guests are positively giddy about the upgrades, and so are hotel chains, which have found the new comforts so popular that they are selling the bedding for use at home.

And the housekeepers? Count them as not so giddy.

"If you have a duvet cover that weighs 22 or 23 pounds and you have to toss that on a bed 15, 18, 20 times a day, you can imagine what that does to your shoulder and back," said John A. Boardman, executive secretary-treasurer of Unite Here Local 25, which represents many District hotel workers.

The new bedding that is the talk of the hotel industry also has become the talk of the unions representing housekeepers, who say their already lengthy workdays have become busier and heavier thanks to all the new coziness. Union officials in California have reportedly made the extra loads a major issue in negotiations with the Oakland Marriott.

In the Washington area, the issue first came up during last year's contentious labor negotiations. Boardman said the union negotiated the right to follow up on what he called a "huge issue." Now, Boardman said, his union is in talks with several hotel chains, including Marriott International of Bethesda, to come up with solutions for the extra workload. One possibility is relaxing the quota of rooms that housekeepers must clean every day.

"In many cases, it's not only the weight of the bedding but the number of tasks that are being introduced into the room," Boardman said. "If you have four pillows in a room and it takes a minute each to change them and then you double the number of pillows in the room, you've just added enough work to knock off one room a day."

Marriott spokesman Tom Marder said he was unaware of an increase in injuries because of the new bedding.

"Guests love the new bedding, and the guest satisfaction scores have gone way up," Marder said. "Once our associates see and really experience the bedding, we've found that they actually respond with enthusiasm and with pride."

-- Michael S. Rosenwald

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