

SAFETY SWEEP

An Employer's Guide to Preventing Injuries to Room Attendants in BC Accommodations



ABOUT THIS GUIDE



RESOURCES

Throughout this document you will find links (highlighted in red) to sector-specific resources, such as checklists, safety talks, and orientation guides.

These resources are also listed at the end of this guide.

This guide is a health and safety resource that outlines key strategies to prevent workplace injuries to room attendants. It is meant for room attendant managers and supervisors (and anyone else who supervises room attendants) who work in hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and other hospitality facilities that offer overnight accommodations.

The injury prevention information in this guide is divided into three sections: recruitment and selection, orientation and training, and ongoing supervision. These sections include best practices that you can use to develop or improve your occupational health and safety (OH&S) program.

Please note that these are not the only best practices out there. You may be able to find other practices that will help you prevent injuries to your room attendants.

Benefits of an injury prevention program

FOR EMPLOYERS

- Demonstrates your company's commitment to a healthy and safe workplace culture;
- Improves employee morale;
- Helps you recruit new employees, especially those who are more safety-conscious;
- Helps you retain employees, reducing the cost of hiring and training new workers;
- Decreases your WorkSafeBC claims, reducing your annual premiums; and,
- Healthy, happy workers make for a better overall guest experience.

FOR EMPLOYEES

- Decreases the likelihood of an employee injury;
- Preserves an employee's full income;
- Positively affects the psychological and emotional wellness of employees;
- Allows employees to maintain valued workplace relationships; and,
- Decreases the risk of negative long-term health effects.

WHY FOCUS ON ROOM ATTENDANT INJURIES?



A recent study commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety found that a room attendant changes body positions (squatting, reaching, bending, and twisting) every three seconds — that's approximately 8,000 times in an eight-hour shift.

Although commonly referred to as “light duty cleaning,” a room attendant’s job is actually very physically demanding. The workload, which is classified as moderately heavy to heavy, burns approximately four calories per minute. Regular duties, such as lifting mattresses, cleaning tiles, and vacuuming, often require repetitive movements and awkward or ergonomically incorrect body positions that can lead to injuries.

The costs of room attendant injuries in a workplace

- Injuries to room attendants in BC’s accommodations sector account for over 40% of the total time-loss claim costs paid by WorkSafeBC annually.
- These claim costs amounted to nearly \$15 million over a five-year period.
- Employees aged 45–54 account for more than one-third of the claim costs.
- Accidents involving overexertion or falls on the same level account for more than half of claims costs. The most common sources of injury are working surfaces, bodily motion, furniture, and fixtures.
- Strains, particularly back strains, account for nearly two-thirds of claim costs.

Safe employees and lower costs

Injuries to room attendants cause personal suffering and result in increased claims costs for your company. In fact, injury costs have been rising in the accommodations sector, resulting in significant increases in WorkSafeBC premiums for all operators. Focusing on injury prevention for your room attendants will help keep your employees healthy, improve workplace morale, and save your company money.

PREVENTING INJURIES TO ROOM ATTENDANTS



You are not required to use all of the best practices in this guide. Many of them are practical, proven methods that are widely used in the tourism and hospitality industry, but it's up to you to decide which approaches will work best for your facility.

Injury prevention initiatives are efforts to prevent injuries entirely or reduce their severity in case they do occur. The following sections provide information, including best practices and resources, that you can use during the three basic stages of an employee's lifecycle. These three stages are recruitment and selection, orientation and training, and ongoing supervision.

Recruitment and selection

Injury prevention begins with selecting the right person for the job. When hiring, consider which qualities are the most desirable for the job and look for those qualities in your candidates. Room attendants are the "occupational athletes" of your team, so they need to be able to work efficiently, work on their feet, and lift, bend, and twist throughout the day.

Best practices

- Develop a **realistic job profile** and ensure that the candidate's physical abilities suitably fit the profile.
- Include health and safety requirements and the physical demands of the job in your **job description**.
- Include questions about physical ability and health and safety when **pre-screening candidates** and throughout the interview process.
- Include a tour of a typical guestroom in the interview process to show the work environment and to demonstrate the job's physically demanding aspects.
- When conducting a **reference check**, ask if the candidate has complied with safe work practices. Try to determine the candidate's physical ability and attitude toward health and safety.

Orientation and training



Trainers need to express their passion and responsibility. Don't fall into a "let's get this over with" attitude, even if you've done the training a thousand times before.

Trainers have an important responsibility. The first few weeks with a new employee are critical. Establishing the safety culture begins on the first day or even during the interview.

Best practices

- Provide trainers with a *health and safety reference manual* that provides a background for orienting new room attendants.
- Assign new employees to a trained, designated trainer or pair them with an experienced employee who can mentor them.
- Encourage employees to ask questions during training.
- Use training tools, such as an *OH&S orientation checklist* (with accompanying *trainer information sheet*) and a *rights and responsibilities quiz*.
- Provide employees with documents, such as *job-specific safety training*, *ergonomic tips*, *safe work practices* for specific tasks, and a "spot the hazards" poster.
- Consider an employee's learning style when providing education, training, or task assignments. Ask open-ended "what if" questions, and listen carefully to responses.
- Respond promptly and appropriately when employees raise safety-related questions and concerns.
- Praise valued behaviours using positive reinforcement. Use plain language and avoid jargon as much as possible.
- Train employees in musculoskeletal injury (MSI) prevention (for example, repetitive strains or sprains).
- Conduct reviews throughout the employee's probationary period, and conduct a post-hire interview to confirm that he or she knows the basic information, such as the company's health and safety representative.
- Maintain orientation and training records. For example, have employees sign off on checklists and other training materials.

Four-step training process

1. **Prepare** — Provide a clear set of expectations for how work should be done. Give the employee health and safety resources, such as written safe work practices.
2. **Show** — Describe how to do a specific task, and then demonstrate it.
3. **Observe** — Watch the employee do the task, and assess his or her understanding of the training. Provide feedback, and correct any mistakes.
4. **Evaluate** — Do spot checks and periodic evaluations to make sure the employee continues to follow the training. Remember, “Inspect what you expect.”

Ongoing supervision

According to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, a supervisor is “a person who instructs, directs and controls workers in the performance of their duties.” One of the key responsibilities of supervisors is to ensure the health and safety of workers. Other supervisor responsibilities are specified in [section 117 of the Workers Compensation Act](#).

Supervisors include owners, general managers, and departmental managers.

You can protect your employees by identifying and controlling hazards in your workplace. Conduct a [risk assessment](#) to identify hazards, and then control them. Types of controls include elimination or substitution, engineering controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment. Once controls are in place, you need to make sure that employees follow them — that’s where supervision comes into play.

RESOURCE
[Supervising for Safety](#) is a free online course for supervisors.

ELIMINATION OR SUBSTITUTION

- Whenever possible, eliminate the hazard so there’s no risk of injury. Consider the following:
 - Is the task necessary to begin with?
 - Can the hazardous part of the task be removed?
 - Can the task be done in such a way that no workers are exposed to the hazard?

Best practices

- *Use pillow-top mattresses so room attendants don’t need to flip them.*

- If you can’t eliminate the hazard, use a safer material or process. Consider the following:
 - Can a different machine or tool be used?
 - Can a less hazardous material or chemical be used to reduce the risk?
 - Are there alternative work practices that can be used or developed to reduce exposure to the hazard?

Best practices

- *Use pump-style spray bottles instead of trigger-style bottles to reduce repetitive strain injuries.*

ENGINEERING CONTROLS

Engineering controls are physical changes to the way tasks are done. Examples include re-designing workstations and modifying equipment to make it safer or more ergonomic.

Best practices

- Use extendable cleaning poles for hard-to-reach places to avoid strain injuries (for example, for cleaning tiles or high dusting).
- Add door stoppers to hinges rather than the bottoms of doors so room attendants don't need to bend down to adjust them.
- Use lighter mattresses or a system such as Bed Toolzzz for making beds.
- Where appropriate, consider motorized carts.
- Use vacuums that are quiet, light, and self-propelled, with reduced vibration and ergonomically friendly handles.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS

Administrative controls are changes to the way work is organized and performed. This can include planning, organizing, and scheduling of resources and staffing.

Best practices

- Rotate work assignments (for example, making beds, cleaning bathrooms, or vacuuming) among two or three attendants so each one is doing something different with each rotation.
- Schedule potentially hazardous work so each employee receives minimal exposure to the hazard.
- Reorganize the workplace to put distance between employees and hazards.
- Consider reducing hours, offering shorter days or work weeks, and providing regular breaks.
- Assign more physically demanding tasks such as stripping guestrooms and making beds to cleaning teams that are more physically able to do such work.
- Incorporate a 5- to 10-minute stretching program into each pre-shift briefing to physically prepare employees for the shift, or invite employees to make use of in-house facilities, such as the gym and spa.
- **Safety talks**, monthly calendars, or e-newsletters with safety tips are good ways to refresh employee knowledge and skills, maintain employee's interest in safety, and demonstrate your company's commitment to safety.



BUSINESS PLANNING TOOLKIT

The **Business Planning Toolkit** is an online tool that helps employers develop health and safety programs. The toolkit helps determine how much injuries are costing you and provides ideas on how to reduce injuries and lower claim costs. It also allows you to compare your stats with other companies in your industry.



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

PPE provides protection against hazards, and is used when other safety controls are not practicable, or in addition to other controls. Consider the following:

- Is PPE available for the hazards that have been identified?
- Are employees trained in the use of required PPE?
- Is PPE properly fitted and maintained to ensure its effectiveness?

Best practices

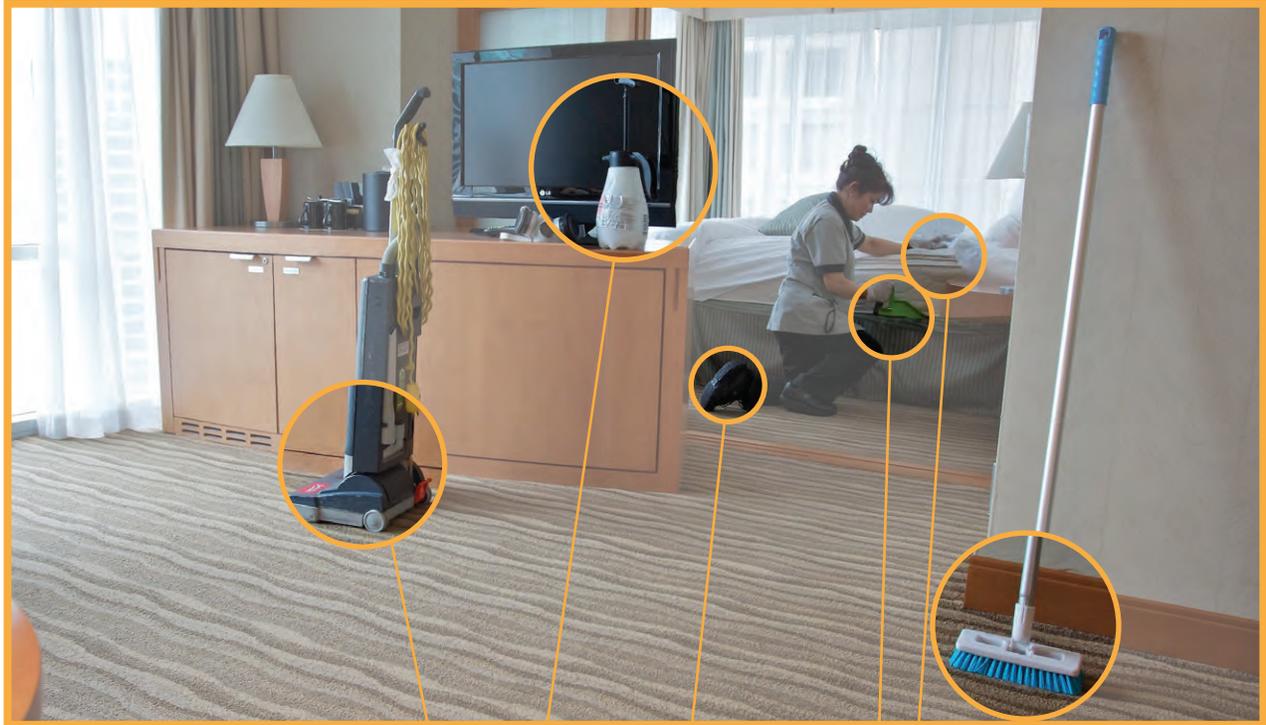
When appropriate, ask your room attendants to wear:

- *Gloves*
- *Non-slip footwear*
- *Masks and goggles*
- *Kneepads*

Keys to creating a culture of safety

While it is important to identify and address obvious unsafe conditions in the workplace, being proactive in creating a culture of safety requires paying attention to employee behaviour (for example, work habits or willingness to take risks). In many cases, supervisors have the most direct impact on shaping employee's attitudes to safety. Don't forget to tell workers when they're getting it right. Positive reinforcement is just as important as correcting mistakes when it comes to building a solid safety culture.

DOING THE JOB, THE RIGHT WAY



Use pump-style spray bottles instead of trigger-style bottles to reduce repetitive strain injuries.



Use a system such as Bed Toolzz for making beds



Use vacuums that are quiet, light, and self-propelled, with reduced vibration and ergonomically friendly handles.



Use pillow-top mattresses so room attendants don't need to flip them.



Wear protective gear such as gloves, non-slip footwear, masks and goggles, kneepads



Use extendable cleaning poles for hard-to-reach places to avoid strain injuries (for example, for cleaning tiles or high dusting).



RESOURCES

The following list includes forms, checklists, and other documents that you can download and customize for your facility (in the order of appearance in this guide):

- [CCOHS room attendant study](#)
- [Physical Demands Job Analysis](#)
- [Job Description](#)
- [Pre-Screening Interview Questions](#)
- [Reference Check Health and Safety Questions](#)
- [OH&S Reference Manual for Housekeeping](#)
- [Health and Safety Orientation Checklist](#)
- [Health and Safety Orientation Information Sheet](#)
- [OH&S Rights and Responsibilities Overview and Quiz](#)
- [Job-Specific Safety Training for Housekeeping](#)
- [Ergonomic Tips for the Hospitality Industry: Preventing Injuries to Room Attendants](#)
- [A Clean Sweep: Safe Work Practices for Custodians \(includes room attendants\)](#)
- [Risk Assessment Tool for Accommodation \(Housekeeping\)](#)
- [Supervising for Safety course](#)
- [Business Planning Toolkit](#)
- [Safety Talk template](#)

Contact information

The following organizations provide tools and resources that you can use to develop or enhance your organization's injury prevention program:

- [Employers' Advisers Office](#)
- [WorkSafeBC](#)
- [go2HR](#)

go2HR provides the resources you need to succeed

go2HR, the BC tourism and hospitality industry's human resource association, is a non-profit society responsible for coordinating the BC Tourism Labour Market Strategy. This includes developing strategies to help BC tourism and hospitality businesses in recruiting, retaining, and training employees, thus supporting the growth and success of the tourism industry.

Working in partnership with WorkSafeBC, go2HR is also the health and safety resource and the certifying partner for the [Certificate of Recognition \(COR\) Program](#) for BC's tourism and hospitality industry.

Acknowledgments

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