



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 16, 2011

California Considers Bill to Make Flat Sheets in Hotels a Crime

Section 1 of the [legislation](#) requires:

The use of a fitted sheet, instead of a flat sheet, as the bottom sheet on all beds within the lodging establishment. For the purpose of this section, a "fitted sheet" means a bed sheet containing elastic or similar material sewn into each of the four corners that allows the sheet to stay in place over the mattress.



The legislation makes changes to the Labor Code, as it is related to workplace safety. The purpose of the law, according to the bill, is to "adopt an occupational safety and health standard for lodging establishment housekeeping." The bill explains, "The standard shall apply to all hotels, motels, and other lodging establishments in California."

While California faces a \$26 billion debt, the legislature somehow believes that it is in the best interest of Californians to burden the hotel industry, which is already struggling. The bill is estimated to add anywhere from \$15 to \$30 million in costs to the hotel industry, as hotels will have to purchase new fitted sheets for the 550,000 hotel beds in the state.

Naturally those in the hotel industry assert that these costs will hurt business and put jobs at risk.

The bill was introduced by State Senator Kevin De Leon. De Leon, whose mother suffered back problems as a hotel maid, said that the bill addresses an issue that is "close to my heart," as the bill has been prompted by a growing number of housekeeping-related back injuries.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, there have been an inordinate number of workplace injury claims filed by housekeeping employees. "More than 7,400 housekeepers working in California hotels have filed workers' compensation claims for injuries they say they suffered last year, including 883 who said they hurt their backs, according to the state Industrial Relations Department," [reports](#) the *Times*. Approximately 10 percent of those claims referenced back injuries, though the reports were not specific as to whether the injuries were mattress-related.

Likewise, Indianapolis' Fox 59 [reports](#):

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that hotel workers have markedly higher injury rates than other service industry workers on average: 5 injuries per 100 workers, while the average for all service industries is about 3.4 injuries per 100 workers. A 2009 report in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* found that housekeepers have higher (7.87 per 100)



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injury rates than other hotel workers, including banquet servers (2.82 per 100), dishwashers (5.97 per 100) and cooks (5.99 per 100).

In order to address all likely causes of back injury, the bill also mandates:

The use of long-handled tools such as mops or similar devices in order to eliminate the practice by housekeepers of working in a stooped, kneeling, or squatting position in order to clean bathroom floors, walls, tubs, toilets, and other bathroom surfaces.

As the statistics regarding workplace injuries of hotel employees did not indicate whether the injuries happened as a result of changing sheets or scrubbing bathrooms, the bill was written to pre-empt injuries during a number of workplace activities.

Hotel Workers Rising!, which represents over 100,000 hotel workers in over 900 hotels in the United States, has articulated [support](#) for the measure. According to the group's website, the proposed changes that would adequately address workplace injury:

To prevent pain and injuries, things as common sense as fitted sheets, like we use at home, save women from lifting heavy mattresses repeatedly over a day. Long handled mops and dusters, rather than rags, mean that room attendants don't have to get down on their hands and knees to clean the floors or climb on bathtubs to reach high surfaces. A reasonable room quota means room attendants aren't forced to rush around, risking slips and falls. These changes can mean the difference between healthy bodies or hurt housekeepers.

The bill has already faced some dissent, including from State Senator Sam Blakeslee, who said, "We are not going to make it a crime in California not to use a fitted sheet? Really?"

A number of bloggers have mocked the legislation, including those at the Constitution Club, which [wrote](#), "Assuming the bill passes ... who is going to enforce it? Mattress police? Fitted-sheet police? Undercover officers posing as hotel maids?"

Perhaps the Constitution Club is on to something. This legislation may give California an opportunity to expand the size of its government a bit further, perhaps creating a department or agency to ensure that the law is enforced. Stranger things have happened in California.



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