



# Playing Dirty

The hotel industry's plan to end daily room cleaning would cost women of color billions

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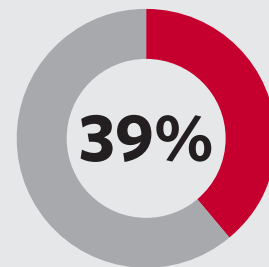
## INTRODUCTION

As pandemic restrictions are lifted, the hotel industry is poised for a comeback — but housekeepers are getting left behind. Time and again, the hospitality industry has used moments of crisis like 9/11 and the Great Recession as an opportunity to cut guest services and eliminate jobs, even though it returned to record profitability after each of these downturns. Now, the hotel industry is again pursuing permanent job eliminations as it emerges from COVID-19.

Almost since this crisis began, hotel executives seized on the pandemic as a chance to end the practice of daily room cleaning, long a target of efforts to reduce labor costs in housekeeping. Epidemiologists, industrial hygienists, and other health experts including former President Obama’s OSHA director have said that daily room cleaning yields similar public health benefits to cleaning other parts of a hotel and is safe when workers have appropriate PPE and the hotel is well-ventilated,<sup>1</sup> and a McKinsey poll showed less than 10 percent of U.S. customers preferred to avoid daily room cleaning.<sup>2</sup> Yet, major companies including Hilton and Marriott have moved to eliminate it as the standard in their hotels. Housekeepers are now fighting to restore daily room cleaning, a key source of jobs and an important protection against overwork.

The end of daily room cleaning in U.S. hotels would eliminate as many as 180,000 jobs held primarily by women of color and create more difficult workloads for housekeepers left to clean dirty rooms after days without disinfection. It would fundamentally change the experience of traveling and cut housekeepers out of the recovery, exacerbating income, racial, and gender inequality. UNITE HERE has won daily room cleaning protections in key tourism markets across North America, but more are needed to protect good jobs in the hospitality industry.

**UNITE HERE estimates  
the end of daily room  
cleaning would cost  
housekeepers up to:**



of all U.S.  
jobs in hotel  
housekeeping

**180,917**  
jobs

**\$4.8 billion**  
in annual  
wages lost

# THREATENING LIVELIHOODS

The end of daily room cleaning would trigger mass job eliminations for hotel housekeepers, overwhelmingly women of color.

Hotels promised enhanced cleaning during COVID-19, and yet, some hotel companies are moving to permanently end the practice of daily room cleaning in order to reduce labor costs. “The work we’re doing right now... is about [making hotels] higher-margin businesses and creating more labor efficiencies, particularly in the areas of housekeeping... When we get out of the crisis, [hotels will] require less labor than they did pre-COVID,” Hilton CEO Chris Nassetta recently told investors.<sup>3</sup> “We view... this crisis truly as an opportunity to redefine the hotel operating model,” said CEO Jim Risoleo of Host, the largest private-sector owner of Marriott hotels.<sup>4</sup> “We won’t have the incremental cost associated with housekeeping.”<sup>5</sup>

Generations of housekeepers have fought for good union jobs, but with fewer rooms to clean, many would lose their jobs forever. Based on 2019 occupancy levels, UNITE HERE estimates that the end of daily room cleaning would permanently eliminate up to 180,917 jobs - nearly 40 percent of the U.S. housekeeping workforce. Many union housekeepers make considerably more than the national average of \$26,540,<sup>6</sup> but even at these low wages, housekeepers would lose \$4.8 billion in wages each year.<sup>7</sup>

Because housekeepers are overwhelmingly women of color, this loss of jobs and income would devastate the communities already hardest hit by COVID-19, police violence, and a spike in hate crimes. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 88.6 percent of housekeepers are women, and 73 percent are people of color;<sup>8</sup> many are immigrants from the Caribbean, China, East Africa, the Philippines, Latin America, and more. UNITE HERE estimates that ending daily room cleaning would cost people of color up to 131,707 jobs and \$3.51 billion in annual wages, a disinvestment that would exacerbate income, racial, and gender inequality.

**Communities of color would be hardest hit by the elimination of daily room cleaning.**

	<b>Percent of U.S. Housekeepers</b>	<b>Est. Jobs Eliminated</b>	<b>Est. Annual Wage Loss</b>
<b>Housekeepers of Color</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>131,707</b>	<b>\$3.51 billion</b>
Hispanic or Latino	40.5%	72,185	\$1.93 billion
Black	21.5%	39,621	\$1.05 billion
AAPI	8.8%	15,197	\$403 million
Native American	2.2%	4,704	\$125 million

*“Losing my job wouldn’t hurt only me, it would hurt my whole family. I have two young children to feed. Without my job, I can’t afford to put food on the table, pay the mortgage, or help my family in the Philippines. The housekeepers in my hotel are almost all women of color, and most of the other jobs we have found have lower wages and unaffordable health care. Housekeepers have fought hard to make our jobs better, and we don’t want to lose them.”*



—Judith Ramirez, Housekeeper at Marriott’s Sheraton Waikiki Honolulu, HI, 3 years

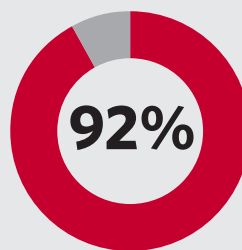
## INCREASING WORKLOADS

Reduced room cleaning also hurts hotel housekeepers who may not lose their jobs but who are left with an even more difficult and painful workload.

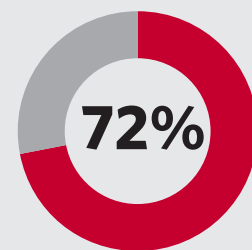
Every day is a race against the clock for hotel housekeepers, who are assigned a daily room quota to complete during their shifts. Prior to the pandemic, a typical day included both “stayover” rooms and “checkouts,” which are harder to clean even when rooms have been serviced regularly throughout a guest’s stay. A 2016 time-motion study of an all-suite hotel found that checkout rooms took 82 percent longer to clean than stayover rooms.<sup>9</sup>

The elimination of daily room cleaning increases the number of checkouts that a housekeeper must

### In a 2018 survey by UNITE HERE of 60 out of 90 housekeepers in a Boston Marriott hotel:



reported that rooms that have not been cleaned daily are more difficult to clean at checkout.



reported experiencing pain, stress, or injury related to cleaning checkout rooms that had not been serviced daily.

clean and makes them dirtier after days without cleaning or disinfection. In a 2018 survey by UNITE HERE, 92 percent of housekeepers reported that rooms that have not received daily cleaning are more difficult to clean at checkout, and 72 percent reported experiencing pain, stress, or injury related to cleaning these rooms.<sup>10</sup> COVID-19 has also made checkout rooms harder to clean. Hotel managers reported in October 2020 that cleaning times for checkout rooms had increased by an average of 15 percent and by as much as 35 percent for resorts with larger rooms or kitchen facilities.<sup>11</sup>

**In a 2016 time-motion study by industry publication *Hotel Management*, checkout rooms took 82 PERCENT longer to clean than stayover rooms.**

In hotels where daily room cleaning has been eliminated since COVID-19, housekeepers have reported rushing and skipping breaks; stress, fatigue, physical pain, and increased reliance on pain medication; and insufficient time to follow cleaning protocols.

*“In all my years as a housekeeper, it’s never been this bad. Since reopening, we’re cleaning almost only checkout rooms, and they’re much dirtier than they used to be. I’m in such a rush that I don’t drink water because I don’t have time to stop and use the bathroom. My body is in pain every day. I don’t think there’s anyone whose body could withstand this.”*

—Rosa León, Housekeeper at Hilton Americas-Houston  
Houston, TX, 17 years



## OUTLOOK

Reduced cleaning, permanent job cuts, and unsafe workloads are not inevitable. Health experts and hotel guests prefer more — not less — cleaning, and thousands of housekeepers have successfully petitioned their employers to protect daily room cleaning.

UNITE HERE has secured daily room cleaning requirements in key markets including New York City, Las Vegas, San Francisco, and more, and will continue working to ensure that guests and housekeepers across the U.S. and Canada can expect daily disinfection. Good jobs are essential to reversing income inequality, advancing racial and gender equity, and protecting workers from getting cut out of the post-COVID recovery.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Harrison et al., to Mayor London Breed, July 17 2020, <https://www.fairhotel.org/sites/default/files/Letter-to-Board-of-Supervisors-Healthy-Building-Ordinance.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Vik Krishnan, Ryan Mann, Nathan Seitzman, and Nina Wittkamp, "Hospitality and COVID-19: How long until 'no vacancy' for US hotels?," McKinsey & Company, June 10, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/travel-logistics-and-infrastructure/our-insights/hospitality-and-covid-19-how-long-until-no-vacancy-for-us-hotels>.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Nassetta, "Hilton Worldwide Holdings' (HLT) CEO Chris Nassetta on Q4 2020 Results - Earnings Call Transcript," Seeking Alpha, February 17, 2021, <https://seekingalpha.com/article/4406752-hilton-worldwide-holdings-hlt-ceo-chris-nassetta-on-q4-2020-results-earnings-call-transcript>.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Risoleo, "Transcript of Host Hotels & Resorts Inc First Quarter 2020 Earnings Call," Issuer Direct, May 8, 2020, <https://ir.hosthotels.com/static-files/9724a8eb-1d19-4926-b653-faa845fadf99>.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Risoleo, "Host Hotels & Resorts' (HST) CEO Jim Risoleo on Q3 2020 Results - Earnings Call Transcript," Seeking Alpha, November 5, 2020, <https://seekingalpha.com/article/4385518-host-hotels-resorts-hst-ceo-jim-risoleo-on-q3-2020-results-earnings-call-transcript>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2020: 37-2012 Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners. National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates NAICS 721100 - Traveler Accommodation, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes372012.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Methodology available upon request: email [twaechter@unitehere2.org](mailto:twaechter@unitehere2.org). Sources for analytic model: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational and Employment Series, May 2019; Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Employment Statistics, Table B-7b, June 2019; Deutsche Bank Monthly Lodging Review, December 2019; Kalibri Labs, November 2019.

<sup>8</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-Year Estimates (occupation code 4230; industry code 8660; SOC code 37-2012 "Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners"; NAICS code 721100 "Traveler Accommodation"), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Housekeeping best practices to improve productivity," Hotel Management, January 20, 2016. <https://www.hotelmanagement.net/operate/housekeeping-best-practices-to-improve-productivity>.

<sup>10</sup> Survey conducted by UNITE HERE Local 26 in June-July 2018 of 60 out of approximately 90 housekeepers at Marriott's Westin Copley in Boston, MA.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Grass, "The challenges of pandemic housekeeping requirements," Hotel Management, October 15, 2020. <https://www.hotelmanagement.net/housekeeping/challenges-pandemic-housekeeping-requirements>.

*Data sources and methodology available upon request.*

***UNITE HERE represents over 300,000 workers in the hotel, gaming, food service, manufacturing, textile, distribution, laundry, transportation, and airport industries in the U.S. and Canada. Ninety-eight percent of its members were laid off at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as of May 2021, over 70 percent remained out of work. Learn more at [unitehere.org](http://unitehere.org).***



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