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## How to mitigate security risk on property

October 3 2012

Risk will always be a part of the game in the hospitality industry. But enacting mock disaster scenarios and developing a thorough concealed carry policy can help increase customer safety.

### Highlights

- Assessing the risk, reducing vulnerability and being prepared can optimize safety on property, attorney Michael Amaro said.
- It's important to enact mock scenarios where employees have to put what they read in a manual to work.
- One benefit of having an in-house security staff is the employees are intimately familiar with their hotel, attorney James Eiler said.

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HOUSTON—Risk is inherent in the hospitality industry, but there are ways to reduce it to minimize the occurrence of an emergency situation, panelists said during The 2012 Global Congress on Travel Risk Management this week.

"Let's face it," Michael Amaro, one of the founding partners of the law firm Prindle, Amaro, Goetz, Hillyard, Barnes and Reinholtz LLP, said during the session titled "Special Considerations for Securing Critical Mass Events and Attractions."

"It's not possible to create a (completely) risk-free environment."

Amaro highlighted three key components in optimizing safety:

- assess the risk;
- reduce vulnerability; and
- be prepared.

He said one exercise that can help accomplish these goals is holding a mock disaster scenario. It is one thing to have best practices tucked away in a manual somewhere, he said, but if employees have not actually faced a situation where, for instance, a hotel guest suffers a heart attack in the fitness center, they might freeze and not know what to do even though they read about it in the manual.



Michael Amaro, co-founding partner, Prindle, Amaro, Goetz, Hillyard, Barnes and Reinholtz LLP.

"I can tell you horror stories all day long."

Thomas R. McElroy, principal and managing member of The Hospitality Security Consulting Group LLC, agreed that simulating an emergency situation will better prepare employees should an actual emergency situation ever arise on property.

"It goes beyond the emergency manual that you pull off the shelf and have to blow the dust off of it," he said.

And engaging in such mock scenarios can reduce liability, said James Eiler, partner at the law firm Kaiser Swindells Eiler.

"I like to see the training because it shows me there was training, and it was reasonable," he said.

### In-house vs third-party security

The panelists spent time debating whether properties should hire their own security



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staff or outsource such work to a third party. There are pros and cons to each approach, they said.

In-house security staff is apt to feel a certain level of loyalty to their employer and also the employer is better able to dictate the level of training of the staff, Amaro said. By the same token, the staff of an outside security company is likely to align their loyalty to their own company.

In-house staff also is well-acquainted with the hotel where they work, Eiler said.

"They know the bowels of that hotel to what's on the roof because that's where they live," he said.

One potential negative, however, is that in-house security might over time become too buddy-buddy with the hotel's other employees and in doing so might become more lax in keeping an eye on everyone inside the hotel, including the other staff, McElroy said.

Amaro said properties don't necessarily have to pick one or the other, especially when it comes to hosting large events. "You will definitely have to have coordination between the inside security folks and the outside guys and the police departments."

**Concealed carry**

The issue of concealed carry, the practice of carrying a gun or other weapon in a public in the U.S., can introduce tricky situations as it relates to customer safety, the panelists said.

When McElroy worked for Hilton Worldwide, he said the company would post signs at every entrance warning guests that concealed carry is not allowed.

"It's still a business," he said. "It's still private property. They can control who or what goes in there."

At the end of the day, individual properties have to take responsibility for security, Eiler said.

"You have to remember it's your name on the door," he said. "It's your name on the flag."

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