

MODULE 1: HOUSEKEEPING PROCEDURE

INVENTORY CONTROL AND STOCK-TAKING

The term 'inventory' refers to the stocks of purchased operating supplies, equipment, and other items held for future use in housekeeping operations. The executive housekeeper is responsible for two types of inventories. Recycled inventory items have relatively limited useful lives, but are used over and over again in housekeeping operations. These include linen, uniforms, most machinery and large pieces of equipment, guest loan items such as hot water bottles, heating pads, irons, and ironing boards, and so on. On the other hand, non-recycled inventory items are used up during the course of routine housekeeping operations. These include most guest amenities, cleaning supplies, and small equipment such as brooms, mops, cleaning cloths, and so on.

The executive housekeeper must establish reasonable inventory levels for both recycled and non-recycled inventories. Over-stocking should be avoided as it ties up cash and calls for a large storage area. There should also be an effective purchasing system to consistently maintain the inventory levels set by the executive housekeeper.

Stock-taking

This is the physical verification of inventory by counting up stocks of all items at periodic intervals. Stock-taking is also termed 'conducting inventory'.

Principles of Purchasing

There are five primary principles of purchasing that need to be upheld by the housekeeping and purchase departments: right quality, right quantity, right price, right time, and right source of supply.

- 1. Right quality-** The housekeeping department is responsible for providing guests with a clean, comfortable, safe, attractive, and luxurious environment. To meet and exceed the guests' expectations in this regard, the department needs to buy the best products. Value for money is a factor in each of the products supplied to the guestrooms and public areas. The entire range of items has to meet the standard and specifications determined by the department and the hotel's management.

2. **Right quantity-** Placing a purchase order of the right quantity is of utmost importance for any organization. A supplier's lure of huge discounts for large quantities should not influence the department's decision. The following factors should be kept in mind when ordering the right quantity of material:
 - The cost of the order being placed.
 - Stock levels and order points.
 - The cost of storage and carrying charges for holding stocks.
 - Quantity discounts.
 - Buffer stocks.

3. **Right price-** One of the major concerns for both the housekeeping and the purchase departments is to get the material at the right price. An in-depth knowledge of the market is vital to make sure that the right price is being paid, that is, the payment corresponds to the exact value of the material purchased. While calculating the right price ex-showroom, the station of dispatch, discounts, packaging, duties, taxes, and so on should all be considered to arrive at the gross price of the item. The terms of payments should also be attended to.

4. **Right time-** The material should be made available at the right time. Lead time", which is the period between the indent originating from the consumer department to the instant when the material is ready for use, should be minimal. The total lead time, which includes the suppliers' lead time plus internal processing, clearance, receipt, and inspection time, should be as low as possible to work on lower inventory levels. The time should also be right as regards ensuring immediate availability of a particular product in the market.

5. **Right source of supply-** The right source of supply is critical to the execution of the other principles of purchasing. If the source is right, the right quality and quantity at the right price and at the right time and place are a natural consequence. The selection of the ideal supplier is crucial for both the housekeeping and the purchase departments, in which they are aided by:
 - Knowledge and experience
 - Catalogues
 - The Internet
 - Hotel suppliers' directories
 - Salespersons

Stages in Purchasing

There are two stages in purchasing: the pre-order stage and the post-order stage.

Pre-order stage- The following steps are involved in the pre-order stage of purchasing.

- 1. Receipt of purchase indent-** The indents should be checked for specifications, quantity required, the last supplier, and the last supplier's rates. If any clarification is required, it should be referred to the indenting entity at once. If the item indented is not part of the planned budget, it needs the approval of the unit head before the indent is processed.
- 2. Floating of enquiries-** Where there is only one manufacturer of a particular product, it is better to contact that manufacturer straightaway instead of approaching commissioned agents or traders. The enquiry should contain complete information.
- 3. Procurement of samples for approval-** The concerned people in the organization must approve of the samples before an order is finalized. Quotation and ordering The order should be placed with the right supplier, who must be identified on the basis of the right quotation for the right quality.

Post-order stage- The following steps are involved in the post-order stage:

- 1. Issue of purchase order-** The purchase order should be issued once the pre-order stage is complete and the right supplier has been identified. Since it is a legal contract between the buyer and the supplier, the purchase order should include all details of the transaction. It should have the date of issue, purchase order number, expected date of delivery, product specifications, quantity (expressed in the appropriate units), brand, batch number, date of manufacture, and so on. Also, delivery instructions should be clearly mentioned, including packaging and mode of transport, time of delivery, and charges. Discounts, if any, must be mentioned in the purchase order as well. Terms of payment, taxes, and insurance should be clearly spelt out and the order should bear the purchase manager's signature, verifying the contents and the terms and conditions. In most organizations, the purchase order has to be approved by the financial controller and the general manager.
- 2. Confirmation of receipt of purchase order-** The supplier should confirm receipt of the purchase order in writing. A duplicate copy of the order should be signed, acknowledging and accepting all the terms and conditions of purchase.

3. **Follow-up-** There should be a regular follow-up to ensure that the items requested will be delivered on time.
4. **Dispatch advice-** A dispatch advice note should be sought from the supplier to expedite the process of receipt.
5. **Receipt note-** When the items are received in good condition and found to meet the desired standards after inspection, the receiving department should make out a goods receipt note (GRN) before transferring them to the main store. If the items do not match the standards prescribed on the purchase order, the purchase manager and the supplier are intimated immediately and the goods are rejected. If the items are deemed suitable for receipt, they are accepted and a GRN is sent to the department concerned to apprise it of the arrival of the goods.
6. **Payment-** After the goods have been received and transferred to department concerned via the main stores, the purchase department has the important function of following up on payments.

PAGING SYSTEMS AND METHODS

The control desk's responsibility for ensuring smooth communications extends to quickly reaching employees in another part of the hotel for special or emergency scheduling.

Electric paging board

At arm's length from the control desk, there is usually an electric paging board with switches for blinking lights installed for this purpose on the various floors. Therefore, if the control desk wants to page a particular member of the staff who is supposed to be on a particular floor, the supervisor may switch on that particular floor's blinker light (zero-watt red bulbs). The staff members are supposed to contact the control desk by phone as soon as they see this message light blinking. The advantage of this method is that information can be passed to a staff member in any corner of the hotel in a very short time. Thus the housekeeping department is able to provide guest service more quickly as well as save the time and energy of the housekeeping staff. If there is no response to the blinker on that floor, it is usually an indication that the particular staff member is not on that floor for some reason, and alternative action can be taken.

Electronic paging method

With advanced technology, it is now possible to give each member of the housekeeping staff an electronic gadget called a pager, which is the size of a matchbox and can easily be carried around. Whenever there is a need to call someone, the gadget is beeped by phone. The staff can then call back the control desk to take the message. This method of paging is useful in large resorts, where cottages can be spread over a long distances. The disadvantage is the high cost involved.

Handling Lost & Found

Lost/Found Register

If a housekeeping guest room attendant finds any guest-owned article left in the Check-Out room then it is recorded in the Lost/Found Register and sent to the same cell of the housekeeping department. It also records any personal article found in the hotel premises.

Exhibit 20.4 Sample format of a lost-and-found register

Lost and Found Register								
Sl. No.	Date	Type of article	Place or room no. where found	Finder's name	Finder's signature	Name of the claimant	Claimant's signature	Remarks

- Articles are many times left behind by the guest but at times staffs too pick them while collecting soiled linen from room by mistake and also with the guest laundry its left back in the pockets of shirt and trouser of guest.
- Every item found is recorded in the lost and found register.
- Each article is given a “serial No.” which makes it easy to locate in the storage. The best way is by numbers 1/1, 1/3, 2/9 so on.

- This means the first thing found in Jan. or 3rd thing found in Jan. and the 9th thing found in Feb. so on. The first number indicates the month and the second number indicates article.
- “Where found” means room number or the specific area where the article is found.
- “Article and Description” means specification of the article found for e.g. whether its shoe or slipper or sandal and male or ladies shoes the size and the colour etc.
- “Disposal” must be recorded, whether it’s returned to guest or given to finder according to the norms of the hotel.
- Often some articles are kept by the hotel and used like any liquor found in the room etc.
- On receipt of the article found the Housekeeping control desk records it in the “lost and found register”.
- The article is packed in a transparent plastic bag with a lost and found slip containing the details as written in the register and stapled.
- One copy of the slip is also sent to the front office for information. Shelving space is divided in the cupboard according to the month, and articles are stored accordingly.
- A lost and found enquiry file is also maintained in the department. As sometimes articles for some reason may come later too.
- Most hotels keep the less valuable articles for six months. Usually, valuables are kept for one year.
- The hotel advises their in-house guest to avail the safety locker facility in Front office cashiers’ office. These days most hotel provide a safety locker box in the wardrobe of the room itself and the guest can have their own code to activate or deactivate it.
- Valuables if found are stored in Ex. Housekeeper’s office in safety locker. Key to which is normally with Ex. Housekeeper.
- At the time of departure the Ex. Housekeeper seals the key in an envelope and deposits it in Front office cashiers’ office so that the key is always available.

- If required the duty manager can collect the keys after signing in the cashiers' key register do the needful and return it again in a sealed envelope.
Note: valuables are marked with red ink in "lost and found register"
- Guest may phone, write or mail and enquire about his/her lost article. They may ask the hotel to post them or might send someone on his/her behalf to collect the article or sometimes even may collect it their subsequent visit to the hotel. The hotel does not charge for postage. The Ex. Housekeeper signs on the register in the disposal column and mentions the address.
- If someone else comes to collect the articles we must ask for an authorization letter and get their signature on the register and the tag. Sometimes the guest collects them then we request them to sign on the register.
- When the storage time is over articles are returned to the finder. The Ex. Housekeeper signs in the lost and found slip which acts as a gate pass for the finder (staff). The valuables are auctioned and money distributed amongst the staff.
- This normally boosts the morale of the staff. Each company has slightly different rules/policy about handling lost and found.

HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS (Guest Queries, Problems and Request)

Aside from these routine tasks, there may be some unexpected difficulties that the housekeeping department may have to deal with. The control desk plays a major role in handling such situations. The situation may be an emergency such as a fire, a worker or a guest meeting with an accident, the aftermath of a guest complaint, or a security problem. Alertness and presence of mind are helpful traits in dealing with difficult situations, and should be cultivated in individual employees. In a hotel, ideally all kinds of difficult situations should be catalogued and policies should be set forth for dealing with such situations. Moreover, employees should be trained in handling difficult situations through role-play, demonstrations, and drills. Two difficult situations are presented below and the possible ways to handle them have been described.

Situation 1 A guest calls the housekeeping control desk and says he is attempting suicide.

Dealing with the situation- This situation implies that the guest is in a state of mental depression and needs counselling. The desk attendant should not panic; he/she must display

presence of mind by, ideally, keeping the guest engaged on the phone by constantly talking and making him/her talk back. In the meanwhile, the desk attendant should get another member of staff to alert the security department so that they can access the room and take custody of the guest.

Situation 2 A guest calls up the control desk to say that she had given a shawl for dry-cleaning, mentioning the same on the laundry list. The shawl has been returned to her considerably shrunk.

Dealing with the situation- The desk attendant should apologize to and try to pacify the irate guest. Then the desk attendant should inform the laundry supervisor about the situation, so that he/she can in turn apologize in person to the guest. The hotel must replace the shawl with a new one.

In this case, the problem probably arose because the laundry attendants did not pay heed to the 'special instructions' column in the laundry form, in which the guest had stated that the shawl needed only dry-cleaning. The laundry staff must have given the shawl a normal wash. The laundry supervisor should thus ensure that the staff pay heed to the 'special instructions' column in the laundry form in future.