

Mohegan Sun

Enforcing smoking policies and winning chargebacks

Property Type: Casino Hotel
Location: North America
Size: 1,563 Rooms



Challenges

- Smoking in non-smoking rooms and inability to discover smoking until after check out
- Complaints of smoking odors from the next guests
- Significant lost revenue from pulling rooms off-the-market (OTM) and compensating guests, especially when the hotel sells out everyday
- Extra time to clean and get smoked OTM rooms ready to rent again
- Unreported smoking due to the large size of the property and the language barrier between housekeeping and operations.
- Lingering smoking smell and damage to soft goods like bedding, drapes, and carpet

Results

- Fewer rooms OTM, leading to less lost revenue and fewer guest complaints
- Instant and significant cleaning fee revenue – covering the cost of FreshAir Sensor (many times over) and providing a revenue boost with large positive return on investment
- Decrease in smoking in non-smoking rooms
- Successful cleaning fee charges and no lost chargebacks on cleaning fees
- Reduction in smoking damage in non-smoking rooms

"In our first 6 months FreshAir Sensor has paid for itself for the next 3 years and we have not had a single chargeback. Revenue boost, cleaner rooms, happier guests. Just try it."

- Mary Wren, Director of Hotel Operations

Interview with Mary Wren, Director of Hotel Operations

Prior to FreshAir Smoking Sensors, what were the main problems your hotel experienced from guest smoking violations?

Our biggest issue was guest rooms needing to be placed Off the Market (OTM) due to odor. We actually sell out everyday, so one room sitting OTM is money lost. We have around 100 guest room attendants working daily and getting them to report the room as having an odor was also a struggle.

For most of them, English is not their first language, so most times guests were never charged due to the poor communication.

When was your team normally discovering the incidents (while they were happening, after check out, etc.)? Were other guests complaining in the moment and/or when new guests entered rooms that had been smoked in?

We never found out until after the Guest had already departed and that was only if housekeeping made us aware. In most cases we would receive the complaint from the new Guest that checked in. This ended up causing even more lost revenue. The room would need to be placed OTM, and we would need to compensate the Guest whose room needed to be changed.

Did you have trouble charging for smoking incidents (such as if no physical evidence was found) and/or dealing with chargebacks after?

Charging has always been a challenge. The casino environment is a unique one. What you get is all based on what you spend, so the Guests sometimes have a feeling of "you can't charge me, I've spent XX in the casino." Almost all would simply just deny. We would have to spend time in rooms looking for evidence to take a picture of in the event of a chargeback. Even then we lost most chargebacks.

Since implementing FreshAir's Smoking Sensors, how have they helped you overcome these issues?

Night and Day! We now have a process that notifies us within minutes of the Guest smoking, so we are able to call the Guest and make them aware of the charge. Most are shocked we even know they smoked, as the devices don't stand out. We still have people who try to deny it of course, but we will email them the document with the graph that clearly shows smoking took place. Most accept this and move on but some will state they will dispute it with their card company. However, after 7 months of installation we have not received a single chargeback.

What results from using FreshAir Sensor's services have been most beneficial to the operations of your hotel, or your property in general?

We have seen a significant decrease in the amount of smoking in non-smoking rooms during the week. Repeat Guests are starting to realize it's not worth paying the fee which is our ultimate goal. They are also starting to book actual smoking rooms now. We do have 2 smoking floors (total of 88 rooms), and we yield these at a higher price point as they are naturally more difficult to clean. On weekends our transient Guest numbers increase which leads to more smoking alerts. In one weekend we can easily pay for the leasing fee for the month.

How has your overall return on investment been (revenue from fees, lowered cleaning costs and damages, reduced compensation to other guests, etc.)? Have you lost any chargebacks since using FreshAir?

Let's just say, in our first 6 months I have paid the lease fee for the next 3 years already! Beyond the revenue from fees, compensation due to rooms smelling like smoke has easily been cut in half. We are now starting to see a benefit on the cleaning side as well. Less burn holes in carpets, less odor elimination chemical being purchased. We haven't lost any chargebacks as Guests have not even tried. Once the evidence is shown to them, they tend to just give up the fight.

If you were to recommend using FreshAir to someone who was on the fence about trying the technology in their hotel, what would you say to them?

Stop thinking about it, just try it! I tend to overthink most things in this business and this is one that has been a game changer on all levels. Revenue boost, cleaner rooms, happier Guests. No reason to overthink.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I have dealt with at least a dozen different vendors in my 21 years at this company and FreshAir has been one of the best! We have direct contact with an account representative who is able to answer any questions we have, most times the same day. In the casino industry that's rare.