Duff on Hospitality Law

November 30, 2010: Hotel Industry Security Forum–Protect Yourself, Your People, Your Properties

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This week, the Washington Lodging Association (WLA) brought together law enforcement officers, intelligence analysts and advisors from the Washington State Fusion Center and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to discuss hotel security, particularly in the context of terrorist attacks and large-scale natural disasters.

The 2008 Mumbai attacks, involving two world class hotels, made those in the hospitality industry exquisitely aware of the vulnerability inherent in the hotel business, where the general public comes and goes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, everyone is carrying a bag or bags and cars, planes, helicopters or even boats are arriving and departing frequently. DHS, as part of its sector-specific infrastructure protection plan, has a number of free resources available to hotels, including a 10 minute video and a poster with general information about how to be alert and protect yourself, your people and your property. Attendees also received additional materials at the forum, including the Protective Measures Guide for the Lodging Industry, produced with input from the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA) and Potential Indicators of Terrorist Activity, Common Vulnerabilities and Protective Measures, targeted to the hotel industry. The latter publications are not available to the public, but interested hoteliers should contact their local Protective Security Advisor (PSA).

According to the threat briefing provided by DHS' regional intelligence officer at the forum, matters are pretty much status quo, although there appears to have been a slight shift from overseas actors to so-called "home grown" terrorists. In addition, and on a related point, every speaker emphasized the importance of looking for suspicious behaviors (i.e. leaving a van parked in front of a hotel and running off, paying cash for a two week stay and not providing a credit card number), not suspicious people (i.e. olive skinned men with black hair and beards, veiled women). The speakers also repeated more than once that you, hotelier, and your housekeeping staff, your valet parkers, your security officers and your front desk employees, are the ones in the best position to determine what is suspicious. This is the idea behind DHS' pairing with private sector interests-DHS makes suggestions but also takes them.

And, on that note, if you feel it appropriate, the Washington State Fusion Center has an online tip reporting tool, as well as a phone line. The Fusion Center is exactly what it says-a fusion of law enforcement officers, analysts, and experts from local, state and federal agencies and the private sector-created to improve

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information sharing and helping protect the people and infrastructure of Washington state.

So, while terrorism and disaster are not the happiest things to contemplate, it's good to be prepared, and to know where you can go for resources and assistance in case you feel you are not.

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