

Hotel Security Jeopardized By Recession?

(CBS) Over a billion travelers stay at U.S. hotels each year and, with the busy summer travel season starting, some security experts say hotels are a lot less safe than in years past.

So, CBS News Science and Technology correspondent Daneil Sieberg and CBS News producer Alison Schwartz Dorfman did an undercover investigation to see if that's the case.

It's a story, he says, that seems all-too familiar: Crimes in hotels. From the extreme cases of international terror to the cases closer to home, such as the "Craigslist murder" and assaults on women travelers.

"I've represented several women who have traveled alone on business, get on the elevator of the hotel, get off on their floor, the assailant follows them from the elevator to their room and attacks them," said Madeline Bryer, a victims' rights attorney.

"Hotels are magnets for crimes," said Chris Falkenberg of Insite Security. "Hotels have been sites of violent crimes, including sexual assaults and homicide."

The country is in a recession, so hotels are cutting costs. Experts say one area that often falls victim is hotel security. One of the weakest links within hotel security is keeping the room number of a guest private. But do hotels follow this procedure?

To find out, Early Show's Schwartz Dorfman and Sieberg set out to see just how easy it might be to get into someone's hotel room.

Armed with hidden cameras, Schwartz Dorfman walked up to the counter to check into a busy New York City hotel. The clerk took her information, as Sieberg stood very close to her.

"First off, your producer is so focused on checking in she's not aware you've encroached on her personal space," Falkenberg said. "The second issue is the clerk doing the checking in could have asked the guest, 'Are you two together?' seeing that you're so close together."

After doing the paperwork, Schwartz Dorfman asked for her room number and the clerk said it out loud.

Falkenberg says the clerk should have been more discreet about her room number, only writing it down or whispering it.

Schwartz Dorfman then headed to her room. Sieberg waited a minute and went right to it, as well. No one noticed anything.

"(An intruder) will use a pretext to get in," Falkenburg told Sieberg. "So if you're not expecting room service or the maid, do one of two things: Look through the peep hole and see, in this case, you (Sieberg) were not uniformed; you don't look like you work in the hotel. Number one. Or get on the telephone and call the front desk."

In fact, Falkenburg said says a hotel hallway is no more secure than a street. But some hotels do have in place strict security measures -- like one where only guests with a room key or I.D. can pass through to get to their rooms, an idea that might help travelers sleep better at night.

"We asked the New York Police Department if they got statistics on hotel crimes, but they didn't get back to us and several hotel companies, including the one hotel where I was able to get access to our producer's room, didn't have hotel crime data. A lot goes unreported, as well," Sieberg said.

"Do you think the onus is on the guest or the hotel?" asked Early Show co-anchor Maggie Rodriguez.

"The hotel wants to keep their guests secure, so it's that balance of safety and comfort, in a sense," Sieberg said. "You don't want to have to have vacation brain. People are not as aware of their surroundings as they should be, which is absolutely critical."

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