



# Man Bites Dog: Union Strikes and Publically Attacks Hotel Brand because of its Go Green Effort

Insights

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We regularly remind employers that third parties, such as unions, and social justice and environmental groups, will use safety as a club to embarrass and bring pressure on a company. Sometimes, these third parties use workplace safety as such an issue even when it conflicts with other tenants of left-leaning groups, such as environmental responsibility or solar power.

Therefore, it may have puzzled readers when they learned this week that the always - aggressive union, UNITE-HERE claims to have taken 1000s of employees out on strike against Marriott properties mainly because of Marriott's Go-Green program.

While the union stated that after months of negotiations, multiple issues remain, there principal claim in the press release is *that "the employer failed to make adequate movement on workplace safety around the so-called green choice program...."*

You have probably encountered Green programs at various hotels but Marriott was one of the first and received praise for their aggressive implementation of this program. Guest can hang a sign on the door refusing maid service for up to three days. In return, they receive Points or coupons. Studies show that substantial energy and water is saved by forgoing a towel change and other basic housekeeping. In fairness, how many of us have the luxury of someone cleaning our home every day in changing out our linen after one use? Seems like a great idea ... right?

UNITE-HERE claims that the main reason for the program is to reduce the number of housekeepers needed. In the linked article from the Boston Globe, the article reports that the program results in many housekeepers working in essence on - call. Housekeepers may not know until the wee hours of the morning whether they will need to come in or not. According to the union, the program has resulted in loss of jobs, lower weekly wages for many housekeepers, and an unpredictable schedule.

## **UNITE-HERE Again Emphasizes Alleged Safety Hazards.**

Interestingly, much of the union's criticism has been based on **the alleged safety issues associated with the Go-Green program**. Among other things, the union claims that it takes far longer and is much more arduous to clean a room after two or three days than on a daily basis. The union argues that employees are more prone to injuries and strains.

While it is a bit startling to see you union and its supporters criticize a Green program, it is not surprising that the union would cloak its demands as safety-driven and not a desire to maintain jobs.

### **UNITE-HERE Has Used Safety as a Club Against Hotels Before ... a lot.**

As we've written before, the same union ran an aggressive campaign for years against the high Corporation alleging that housekeepers were required to clean too many rooms per shift, resulting in ergonomic injuries. The union orchestrated the filing of dozens of OSHA complaints throughout the Country, supported studies and articles criticizing hotels for causing ergonomic injuries, and in some cases, prompted local ordinances about limiting the number of rooms per day that employers could require housekeepers to clean, or even dictating certain types of more easily fitted sheets.

### **And What about Tesla and the UAW?**

Tesla's recent missteps have been painfully reported in detail, and it likely includes growing pain safety issues as they ramp up to an unprecedented level. However, the Cal-OSHA complaints, like so many other attacks on Tesla are the result of a standard Union Organizing Tactic. Our Bog Posts Part I and Part II.

And such attacks are not limited to unions as shown by corporate campaigns against Amazon, Fast Food Restaurants, Poultry Processors, Distribution, various airports, and other employers.

### **Lessons Learned.**

We should not need further motivation to aggressively protect workers and ensure an effective safety culture, but a genuine risk of safety issues being used to seriously demonstrate a company's brand should serve a powerful motivator to executives to get their hands dirty and ensure that their safety culture is what they assume – it may not be.

And remember, you may maintain an effective safety culture and experience minimal injuries, but still be vulnerable to low hanging fruit common OSHA compliance issues. Moreover, we hope that every employer has site and corporate plans for responding to employee fatalities and catastrophes, OSHA and other governmental investigations, natural disasters, workplace violence and other scenarios, but do you have a plan in place to respond to such a sophisticated campaign against your Company?

### **A Final Note.**

As in almost every workplace issue and union campaign, there usually is some level of legitimate concerns on which the parties can agree, so smart employers will dig deeper. However, as to the rest of us, we can show appreciation in our own way to the housekeepers who clean the rooms of weary road warriors like myself.

Some years back my wife alerted me to the effort publicized by Maria Shriver when she and Arnold were still married, to leave a tip for housekeepers. I do so. Interestingly Maria Shriver partnered with Marriott in 2014 to encourage that effort with Marriott's "The Envelope Please" campaign ....

Howard