



# Marriott's Dirty Choice

How "Your Choice" Harms Housekeepers



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# Introduction

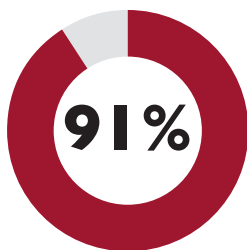
Marriott is the largest and wealthiest hotel company in the world with more than 6,500 hotel properties. Many Marriott hotels have programs that encourage guests to decline housekeeping services.

In 2016 Marriott purchased Starwood Hotels and Resorts, owner of the Westin, Sheraton, and W hotel chains. Starwood branded its deferred rooms cleaning program as “Green Choice”, citing its purported environmental benefits. Marriott now uses a similar “Your Choice” program at many of its legacy properties, including Marriott and Renaissance brands.

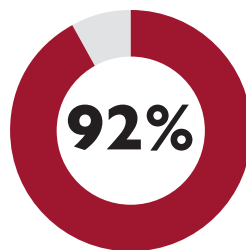
These programs save money for Marriott and hotel owners. Host Hotels & Resorts, the largest owner of Marriott hotels, told investors “we continue to see benefits from Marriott’s implementation of Make a Green Choice...”<sup>1</sup> and “sustainability initiatives that provide guests with the option to forgo housekeeping services in exchange for reward points, like Marriott’s Your Room Your Choice, and Starwood’s Make a Green Choice program are also positively impacting expenses.”<sup>2</sup>

Both Your Choice and Green Choice programs reward guests with vouchers and loyalty points for turning away housekeeping services they have already paid for. These programs save money for Marriott<sup>3</sup> but often have a damaging impact on hotel housekeepers.

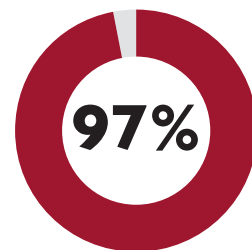
60 housekeepers at the Westin Copley in Boston, MA, reported on their experiences with the Green Choice program in a 2018 survey<sup>4</sup>. The Westin Copley is a Marriott hotel that has had the Make a Green Choice program under Starwood for a decade:



**91%** of more recently hired housekeepers—those with 10 or fewer years on the job—have been left off the schedule or lost hours because of the Green Choice program.



**92%** reported that cleaning Green Choice rooms is harder, compared to rooms that are cleaned daily.



**97%** reported that Green Choice rooms are dirtier than rooms that are cleaned daily.

# A Dirty and Difficult Choice

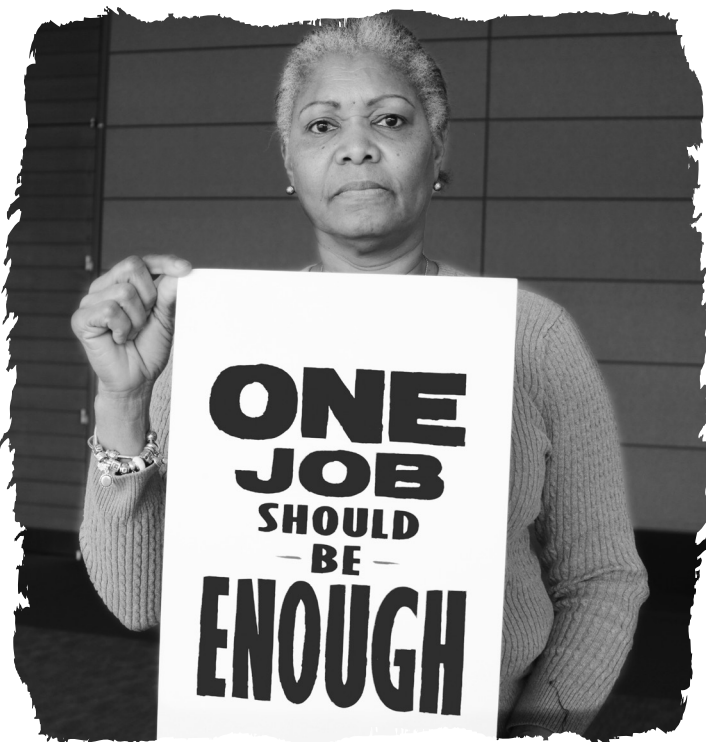
Dirt, trash, and even mold can accumulate when rooms are not serviced for multiple days. But housekeepers are not given any extra time to clean these dirtier and hard to clean rooms.

“Recently I cleaned one room. It was Green Choice, but I didn’t realize that at first. I started cleaning. The bathroom was very, very dirty. All 12 to 15 towels were used. My partner, who works on the other side of the hotel, had already finished cleaning three rooms, but I was still working on the bathroom of this Green Choice room.”

— **RUMIYA ASANOVA**, Housekeeper,  
Palace Hotel, San Francisco

“Specifically, yesterday, which was July 11th, I had 3 Green Choice rooms that had not had service for 4 or 5 days. The rooms were really nasty. It took me an hour or more to clean the room. More towels, more trash, more of everything. I leave really tired from work, and my shoulders hurt.”

— **ESTER RAMOS**, Housekeeper,  
San Jose Marriott, San Jose



“When I clean the bathtub, I need to scrub it up to three times. Because with only one time, it won’t get clean. On the bathtub, grease from the body leaves a really strong filth. This grease stays stuck on the bathtub. The table has many finger marks on it. You have to do it with force. The fridge is full of food. We need time to do this work. We cannot do it in half an hour like we do others.”

— **LINA BRITO**, Housekeeper,  
Westin Copley, Boston

“We request special liquids, bleach or something stronger, in order to get rid of the filth that stays, for example, on the bathtub it’s most noticeable. This is to be able to clean it. Because the products that we commonly use don’t easily remove it.”

— **JESENIA SANCHEZ,**

Housekeeper, Westin Gaslamp, San Diego



## A Hazardous Choice

Because the rooms are so dirty, housekeepers report using larger quantities of hazardous chemicals.<sup>5</sup> These products may “cause damage to eyes,” “cause severe irritation to skin,” and “irritate throat and respiratory system.”

“I have to use a lot of bleach. And the bleach is really bad above all else for me. Because now I have lung problems. And I think it is because of the dust and the chemicals.”

— **ESPERANZA NIEVES,**

Housekeeper, Westin  
Copley, Boston

“I have to use double the chemicals I am supposed to use.”

— **SORINELDA PABÓN,**

Housekeeper, Westin Boston  
Waterfront, Boston

“Now the stuff they give us, it makes you cough. Your nose is constantly running— constantly. You know my eyes burn. I come in there starry eyed, bright. I leave, I look like I’ve been through the ringer.”

— **EVELINA CRAVENS,**

Housekeeper, Marriott Union  
Square, San Francisco

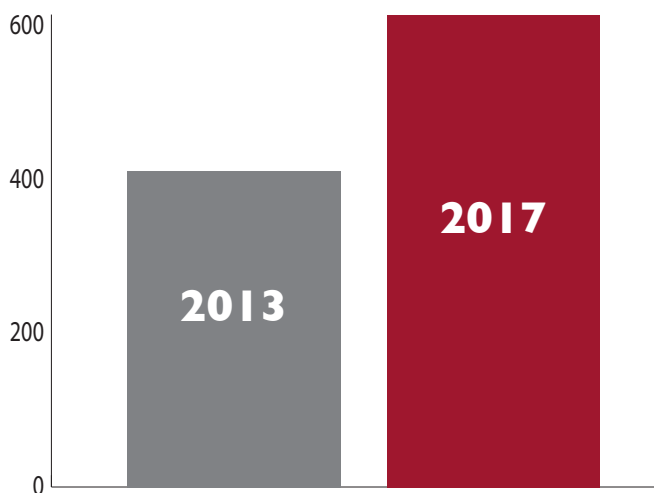


# A Painful Choice

Housekeepers typically have a daily quota of rooms to clean. Many Marriott housekeepers report rushing to finish their quota when rooms are left un-serviced. Housekeepers experience pain, injury, and stress, while cleaning rooms with days worth of filth.

The Green Choice program has been in practice longer at legacy Starwood hotels. An analysis of 23 legacy Starwood hotels over 9 cities shows that Legacy Starwood hotels had a 49% increase in the number of injuries between 2013 and 2017<sup>6</sup>.

**72%** of surveyed housekeepers at the Westin Copley have experienced pain, stress, or injury **related to cleaning a Green Choice room.**



“I’m working in excruciating pain. I have all kinds of ailments since I started doing this work. I came here a healthy, fit, sane person. Now, I have trouble with my arm. I’m going to have to have surgery. I have trouble with my back. I have trouble with my toes. I’ve injured my shoulder. They put me back to work so fast I couldn’t even – my head was swimming. I’m working in pain. Green Choice is going to run us all out. We have to rush so fast and do so much, we’re injuring ourselves.”

— **EVELINA CRAVENS**, Housekeeper, Marriott Union Square, San Francisco

“Sometimes because of rushing to finish our rooms, we hit or bump the wall or the side table of the bed. The first time, I injured my left shoulder. I got this from lifting and tucking in the corner side of the mattress, because of the weight. My second injury was my elbow. Same thing, because I tucked in a sheet. My third injury was this year, last March. When I was pulling the big cart out to close the door of the room which I cleaned, I smashed my finger between the door frame and the big cart. That was very hard because you’re always rushing. If you do not rush, you cannot finish 15 rooms.”

— **ANELITA VERGARA**, Housekeeper, Westin Seattle, Seattle

## Pain Follows Housekeepers Home

“Well, in my case in particular, it has impacted me a lot. Because I have small kids, and I leave after a day of work so exhausted. It’s really difficult to arrive home and concentrate or play with them. And to give them—the little time that you can be with them and it’s horrible because your body simply won’t respond. It’s so much with the stress, the headaches, the fatigue—and my family is happening on top of that.”

— **JESENIA SANCHEZ**, Housekeeper,  
Westin Gaslamp, San Diego

“We leave really tired. I don’t have time sometimes to spend with my family. Because I leave with back pain and shoulder pain. And we end the day like that, tired at home, in order to begin the next day. Green Choice affects us in many ways.”

— **GLORIA CARRILLO**,  
Housekeeper, San Jose Marriott,  
San Jose

“The pain causes me to have to take this really strong ibuprofen painkiller. It hurts my stomach and organs. It stops my pain, but it effects my other organs.”

— **LINA BRITO**,  
Housekeeper, Westin Copley,  
Boston

“I have a 5-year-old boy. When I go home, I can’t cook for him. I can’t play with him. Because my back and my foot hurt, and I cannot stand on my feet because I have pain. I cannot do anything. The housekeeping affects me everywhere I go.”

— **SOUKAYNA TANDEFTE**, Housekeeper, Aloft, Boston



# A Choice that Destroys Jobs

Many travelers believe that turning down cleaning services helps housekeeping staff by reducing their overall work. According to housekeepers, this is almost never the case. Because deferred service programs result in fewer rooms to clean, hotels routinely staff with fewer hotel workers or place more hotel workers on on-call scheduling.

An analysis of the same 23 legacy Starwood hotels over 9 cities shows that these hotels had a decrease of over 700,000 work hours between 2013 and 2017<sup>7</sup>. This is equivalent to over 350 full-time jobs lost.<sup>8</sup>



Housekeepers at 6 hotels in Boston in 2016 lost over 6,800 shifts and \$1.7 million in wages and benefits because of an estimated 89 thousand room nights not serviced because of the program.<sup>9</sup>





“I have worked at the hotel for 13 years, and I still don’t have a regular schedule and a regular day-off. Since the Green Choice program started, I don’t get scheduled to work regularly. I have to put my cell phone under my pillow when I go to sleep, because I worry that if management cannot reach me when they call me in to work, I will lose a day of work. Also, because my dad is also very old now, he has a lot of medical appointments I can barely find the time to bring him to. And because I don’t have a regular day-off, I have to cancel the appointments if I get called in to work all of a sudden. I feel that the hotel controls my whole life, and I don’t really have a choice.”

— **YE QING WEI**, Housekeeper, Sheraton Boston, Boston



“Even if they post the schedule in the morning, we’re still not 100% confirmed because they might change it in the middle of the night, or in the morning. You’re ready to go to work, and all of a sudden, they will call and say, “your work’s cancelled,” or “your schedule is from morning to turn down.” So basically, there is no life at all for us.”

— **YLEINE DEMASANA**, Housekeeper,  
Westin Bayshore, Vancouver



“Today, I had a guest who asked, “can you give me four of each of the towels?” So I asked if he was doing the Green Choice program, and he said, “Yes. Give me two soaps, give me extra water.” And the company is telling us to give it to them anyways. If they ask for something, give it to them. I believe it is about cutting hours.”

— **NOMELITA PAGUIO**, Housekeeper, Westin Bayshore, Vancouver

## Marriott rewards guests for a choice that harms housekeepers

98% of surveyed housekeepers report<sup>10</sup> that they provide services to guests who have opted out of housekeeping. While travelers receive points or vouchers for declining services, housekeepers still end up providing them—in addition to their daily room quotas.

Additional services included:



removing dirty towels  
providing clean towels

providing more of any amenities



providing water bottles

removing guests' laundry



taking out the trash

entirely changing the sheets



providing extra soap,  
shampoo, and conditioner

cleaning the entire room



## Endnotes

- 1 Host Hotels and Resorts Inc Q1 2018 Earnings Call
- 2 Host Hotels and Resorts Inc Q3 2017 Earnings Call
- 3 [https://www.hospitalityupgrade.com/\\_magazine/MagazineArticles/Sustainability-We-Cannot-Afford-NOT-to-be-Green.asp](https://www.hospitalityupgrade.com/_magazine/MagazineArticles/Sustainability-We-Cannot-Afford-NOT-to-be-Green.asp)
- 4 All percentages presented in this report are based on a survey UNITE HERE Local 26 conducted in June-July 2018 of 60 out of approximately 90 housekeepers at the Westin Copley in Boston, MA.
- 5 From the Material Safety Data sheet of Austin's A-1 Bleach, reported to Local 26 from the Westin Copley. The MSDS of GelPro and LemonLift also report hazards.
- 6 The 23 hotels reported injury data on their 2013 and 2017 300 OSHA forms.
- 7 The 23 hotels reported data on total hours worked on their 2013 and 2017 300 OSHA forms.
- 8 Using a full-time employee equivalent of 2,000 hours a year, as per OSHA guidelines.
- 9 Marriott provided the union with information on the number of rooms occupied and the number of rooms cleaned at 6 legacy Starwood hotels in Boston. The union assumes that 5% of the total occupied rooms were DNDs, and the remainder of uncleaned rooms were MAGC, based on the 5% DND figure provided by the Westin Waterfront. Shifts are estimated using 13 rooms cleaned per room attendant per day. Wages and benefits were calculated using Boston's current rate for unionized room attendants of \$21.45 in wages and \$9.69 in benefits.
- 10 In the union's June/July 2018 survey at the Westin Copley in Boston, MA.

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# Make a Better Choice

“ I love my job, but when guests are encouraged to deny housekeeping services, it hurts my hours, my pay, and my body. Rooms that haven’t been cleaned in days are dirty, and much harder to clean. **We’re asking guests to make a better choice instead.**”

— **ANELITA VERGARA**, Housekeeper,  
Westin Seattle Downtown, Seattle

