

Business

Hotel room upgrades aid guests with asthma

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As many as 5,000 Hilton hotel rooms nationwide may be allergen free by next year, according to Environmental Technology Systems Inc., a Glen Ellyn-based firm that specializes in indoor air quality.

Founder Nick Nardella said Environmental Technology is in final negotiations with Hilton, the flagship brand of Hilton Hotels Corp., to convert 5 percent of rooms at 248 hotels into allergen-reduced "enviro-rooms."

Renovations in 80 cities would begin in the third or fourth quarter of 2007.

"We're negotiating right now to figure out how the rollout is best served," said Nardella, who founded the company in 2001.

The company first made a foray into hotels with the Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport hotel in 2005, creating two enviro-rooms at a cost of roughly \$8,000 per room, according to a Hilton spokeswoman. High demand and guest feedback motivated the hotel to add 11 more rooms earlier this month.

As many as 50 million Americans suffer from allergies, according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and both allergies and asthma are increasing.

Hilton is "trying to slice and dice the marketplace into smaller and smaller pieces and aggressively pursue those pieces," said Jan Freitag, vice president of hotel research firm Smith Travel Research. "You have to ask, how big is that market? Obviously, they've done their research and they think the market is big enough."

At the Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport hotel, guests staying in an enviro-room pay an additional \$25 per night. "We use them quite frequently," said John Silvia, the acting general manager, who describes guest feedback as "very positive."

Room modifications include hardwood floors, all-cotton bedding, anti-microbial treatments that stunt germ growth on doorknobs and faucets, and wallpaper that is dotted with thousands of pin-sized holes to prevent trapped moisture from causing mold growth.

"We basically gut the room," said Tom Lundy in the engineering department at Environmental Technology. "All the stains, paints, glues (and) adhesives have to meet very specific standards. We try to eliminate things that will hold or collect dust or odors."

A system also monitors air quality, notifying staff of potential problems.