

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Human Trafficking Training and Certification Requirement for Hotels Ordinance

1. Why did the City mandate Human Trafficking Training and Certification for hotels?

We know that traffickers often use hotels to facilitate trafficking in persons, be it for sex trafficking, moving a sex trafficking victim from city to city to exploit them or to use sub-contracted labor that is then exploited. We also know that traveling sales crews (groups of teens and/or young adults) that are forced to sell products such as magazines often stay at hotels. In a study conducted by Polaris, the national human trafficking think tank, 75% of sex trafficking victims surveyed reported being at a hotel during the course of their victimization. Furthermore, a January 27, 2020 Houston Chronicle editorial detailed the alleged victimization of 15 and 16-year old girls being sold for sex out of Houston hotels; anyone under the age of 18 is automatically a victim of sex trafficking, no elements of force, fraud or coercion are required.

2. How will these requirements improve public safety?

As of February 19, 2020, there are approximately 524 hotels within Houston's city limits. Over a span of 4 years, HPD conducted 269 operations at 116 hotels with the hoteliers' cooperation. Presumably, the required training, certification and sign posting will increase the tips reported to law enforcement agencies resulting in more targeted operations that span the city.

3. Do "hotels" include motels and extended stays?

Yes.

4. Does this ordinance cover Air B&B owners/rentals?

No.

5. How often do I as a hotel owner, operator or manager have to provide training?

Annually. Training certifications must be filed no later than March 31st of each year, the first filing will be due on March 31, 2021.

6. If as an owner, operator, or manager I recently provided training, do I have to provide this again?

If the training was provided within the last 12 months, you can file the training certificate with the ARA department, if it is an approved training. If the training conducted falls out of this time frame or you do not have attendance logs, you will have to provide training again. If there were changes made to the training after you used it, you will have to repeat the training and provide the associated certification. New employees need to be trained within 30 days of their hire.

7. Do I have to pay for the training? Is it available in multiple languages?

No, there is a pre-approved and free option available on-line that can be projected to your employees with accompanying attendance sheets titled "Preventing & Responding to Human Trafficking and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children - an E-Learning by ECPAT-USA" and found at the following link: <https://www.ecpatusa.org/blog/2020/3/27/ecpat-usa-offers-hotel-industry-anti-trafficking-training-for-free>. And yes, this training is available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Deutsch (German), French (Canadian), French, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese (Brazil), Russian, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese. For a full list of pre-approved trainings, please visit: <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>

8. Is there live training available? What languages is the live training available in?

Yes, there is free live training available through a partnership the City has with United Against Human Trafficking in English and in Spanish. You can find information on our webpage at <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>

9. What if I am not sure if the training I used or would like to use meets the parameters?

Do not use the training if it has not been pre-approved. You can email a copy of documentation or the web link to the training to the Mayor's Office Human Trafficking Division at info@humantraffickinghouston.org and allow 5 business days for approval. You can also consult a list of pre-approved trainings found here: <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>

10. Can I upload the certification using the same on-line system for the Hotel Occupancy Tax hosted by Houston First?

Unfortunately, no. The ARA Department uses a different database than Houston First.

11. Where can I upload the certification?

We currently do not have the ability for online submissions, however we are working on this feature and will notify you when the option is available.

12. Can I mail in the certification form? If so, where do I mail it?

Yes. You can mail it to:

City of Houston
Administration & Regulatory Affairs Department
Attn: Business Licensing Division
PO Box 1561
Houston, TX 77251-1561

Please remember that the postmark must be on or before March 31st of each year.

13. Where can I get the city mandated sign that is in compliance with the ordinance and Director's Rules?

You can download a sign here: <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>. The signage will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu and Gujarati. Please see Director's Rules for additional information: <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>

14. Are there late fees associated with this ordinance?

Yes, there is a \$25 late certification processing fee that must be turned in with the late certification.

15. Can I pay my late fee online?

No, if your certification is late, you must mail in your certification and the fee for processing.

16. Where do I have to post the sign and how many signs should I post?

Where the employees can clearly see them. There is no set minimum of signs. Please refer to the Director's Rules for additional information regarding the signage. You can locate the Director's Rules here: <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/human-trafficking-prevention>.

17. What records as a hotel owner, operator or manager am I required to keep?

You are required to keep attendance records for all employees that attended the trainings, the date of the training, and the training used. If ARA or HPD request to look at your training records, you will have 72 hours to produce them.

18. Which city entity will be responsible for enforcing this ordinance and is there a fine for violations?

Both ARA and HPD will enforce this ordinance. Yes, there is a fine for violations. \$100 for the first offense and \$500.00 for each subsequent violation. Each day of each violation is a separate offense.

19. When does the ordinance go into effect?

The ordinance took effect immediately upon City Council approval on April 15, 2020. However, hotels will have to file their 1st certification by March 31, 2021.