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All 453 guest rooms of the Hilton Hawaiian Village's new Kalia Tower are closed indefinitely because of a mould problem.

## Mould plagues Hilton tower

**Waikiki's largest hotel closes  
its Kalia guest rooms to get  
a handle on the damage**

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What began as a report of mould in a single room at Hilton Hawaiian Village a month ago has spread, leading Hilton to close all 453 rooms of its newly built, \$95 million Kalia Tower.

A Hilton housekeeper found the mould in early June, so Hilton closed the room and began investigating other rooms in the Kalia Tower, said Peter Schall, senior vice president and managing director of Hilton Hawaiian Village. Room by room, more mould was found and the units were closed, Schall said. On Tuesday, Hilton decided to close off all rooms, 71 of which were occupied, and move guests to other towers, Schall said.

Yesterday, Schall met with employees and told state Health Director Bruce Anderson of the problem.

Hilton Hawaiian Village, Waikiki's largest hotel, opened the 24-story Kalia Tower in May 2001. Other facilities in the tower are not affected by mold and remain open, including the Mandara Spa, Holistica Hawaii Health Center, Niumalu Cafe & Bar and the Lanikai Executive Lounge, Schall said.



## Mold has closed all guest rooms in the Hilton's Kalia Tower.

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The mold was most visible on furniture in the rooms, and Hilton has hired experts to find the cause, Schall said. A preliminary search has found that rooms in Hilton's other five towers are OK, Schall said, though the hotel did find mold in a corridor of its Lagoon Tower. That tower was recently renovated and reopened last year as the 264-unit Hilton Grand Vacations Club time-share resort.

"We have had only one report of a minor health issue which may be related to this situation -- one of our employees sustained a rash, and the employee returned to work the next day reporting that she felt fine," Schall said. No visitors have reported related health problems, he said.

About 50 employees regularly work in Kalia Tower's guest rooms, he said.

Mold, depending on the type, is no laughing matter. The nation's largest property insurer, State Farm, said in September that it would stop selling new homeowners policies in Texas because of losses related to mold damage.

Maui County employees were evacuated from a building last year after complaints of eye irritation and one report of respiratory problems. A colony of *Stachybotrys fungus* was found on a water-stained ceiling tile in the building.

Mold is typically caused by water damage, and exposure can cause asthma, sinusitis and infections, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Dr. James Craner, an expert in indoor air quality, had a simple assessment: "If they shut this building, they have a problem. That's a big problem."

"Exposure to certain mold spores that come from water-damaged building materials is a potential health hazard," Craner said in a telephone interview from Nevada. Of particular concern are exposure to the *Stachybotrys chartarum*, various species of *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*, and a few others.

Mold spores continually pass through the air, both indoors and outdoors, and may begin growing wherever they find a damp spot indoors, according to the EPA. Controlling moisture is the key to controlling mold.

Schall said Hilton has not yet determined what type of mold has infected its tower, and the firm has hired air-quality expert Philip Morey, who works for Atlanta firm Air Quality Sciences Inc.

A few weeks ago, Hilton hired another air-quality firm, Penn Air Group, which examined the rooms and found that humidity in the rooms was higher than normal. The group did not find the cause, Schall said.

"This being a corporation, I would assume that somebody's worried about liability," said Eric Gill, financial secretary-treasurer of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 5, which represents workers at Hilton Hawaiian Village.

For the past month, the union has been receiving reports of the mold from its workers, but until yesterday had gotten no official word from the hotel, Gill said.

"They're telling us some very general stuff," he said. "As we speak, we're sending them requests for information."

The disclosures come at a prickly time for the union, which is negotiating a new contract with Hilton and recently authorized a strike vote for Aug. 13, covering 1,500 employees at the hotel.

The union is looking into reports that Hilton previously told hotel employees that the mold was harmless and that they should just clean it up, Gill said. A union subcontractor, Team Clean Inc., was also asked to clean the mold and was told it was harmless, Gill said. He noted that the union needed to confirm the reports.

When asked if the hotel had attempted to clean the mold, Schall said it was possible and that he couldn't answer the question for sure. A Team Clean official did not respond to a request for comment.

Hilton has asked employees to report potential cases of exposure.

"We did inform them that exposure to mold can cause irritation to the eye," Schall said.

Anderson, the state health director, said he learned of the situation yesterday from Schall.

"He went over the steps they are taking, and I'd say they are very appropriate," Anderson said. "I'd say they are taking a cautious approach in protecting the health of employees and guests."

Hilton guests have been routed to other towers on the property, though during high season -- late this month and early in August -- Hilton will have to send some guests to other hotels in Waikiki, Schall said. Kalia Tower makes up 13 percent of Hilton Hawaiian Village's 3,432 rooms.

The potential cost of the tower's closure or cleanup was not available. Hilton is not sure how long it will take to reopen Kalia Tower.

## **Kalia at a glance**

The Kalia Tower at the Hilton Hawaiian Village:

>> 24 stories, 453 rooms  
>> Opened: May 2001  
>> Cost: \$95 million  
>> First new Waikiki hotel tower construction  
in more than 10 years  
>> Construction began: August 1999  
>> Also in the tower: Niumalu Cafe & Bar,  
Mandara Spa, Holistica Hawaii Health Center,  
conference center and Bishop Museum at Kalia  
>> Architect: Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo  
>> General contractor: Hawaiian Dredging  
Construction Co.

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