

Harrah's gets more time from county to fix work

The county's building division recently gave Harrah's Entertainment another month to correct substandard or undocumented remodeling at its Strip property, Harrah's Las Vegas. It is customary for the county to extend deadlines when property owners are making progress at fixing code violations but can't comply in 30 days, a county spokeswoman said.

„In all these notices of violation, we are working very hard and very cooperatively to address the issues as quickly as possible,“ said Marybel Batjer, a spokeswoman for Harrah's entertainment.

„Harrah's did not ask“ for the extension, Stacey Welling, Clark County public information analyst, said. „In this case, you have a pretty significant process going on. ... Given the scope, it's not surprising we would have to grant the extension.“

When a property owner resists making repairs, the county doesn't grant extensions but issues citations to ratchet up the pressure, Welling explained.

Harrah's Entertainment admitted on Oct. 8 that improper remodeling needed to be investigated at Harrah's Las Vegas. That day it voluntarily shut down more than 600 guest rooms at the hotel for investigation and repairs.

The action at Harrah's Las Vegas followed a county order on Oct. 5 to vacate 140 guest rooms at a sister property, the Rio, in order to assess the extent of remodel work there that evaded legal requirements.

On Nov. 2, Harrah's Las Vegas returned to guest use a block of 501 rooms on floors 4 through 19 of the Carnivale tower, which

underwent repairs and passed county building inspections. A smaller number of rooms at the Rio also passed inspections and returned to service.

Exploratory work and corrective construction continue in other locations at Harrah's Las Vegas. The violation notices that were recently renewed – and will expire Dec. 20 – pertain to many areas of the hotel: a piano bar on the casino level; floors 19 through 23 of Harrah's north Mardi Gras tower; floor 35 of the south Carnivale tower, offices for human resources, risk management, security, surveillance, training; and a sewage pump room in one basement.

County commissioners in early November OK'd a contract for Kessler International to audit the process by which the county building division handles complaints. A former remodel worker at the Rio alleged illegal remodeling in a complaint he filed in August 2006. The division did nothing until February 2007, when an inspector visited the Rio, then wrote a four-paragraph report the same day, dismissing the complaint.

Official reports from the county building division and county fire department document the irregularities that investigators have uncovered since early October at Harrah's Las Vegas, either in construction or in its fire protection systems.

Batjer, who is Harrah's Entertainment vice president of public policy and communications, asked that the violations be viewed in the context of a multi-layered safety system that includes the alarms, sprinklers, fire-smoke control and fire-rated walls.

„They're all put in place to act as redundancies,“ she explained. „If there is one item, a sprinkler head, that is not properly in place, there are other things built within that redundant system that would mitigate that issue. It is a system that in its entirety is functioning, although at times there is something within that system that is malfunctioning.“