

Proactive and Preventative

FIRE SAFETY PLANS WITHIN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

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The consequences of inadequate fire safety planning are especially serious for those who are vulnerable due to illness or infirmity, such as those receiving institutional care. Residents depend on the knowledge, training and action of supervisory staff in providing and maintaining a fire-safe environment. Procedures contained in a Fire Safety Plan (FSP) must be designed specifically for each building. In a fire emergency, properly followed procedures should reduce the risk to life safety for all long-term residents, short-term residents (patients), visitors and staff.

An effective FSP requires a commitment from the owners, managers, administrators and supervisors of institutional facilities. They must be intimately familiar with their responsibilities under the Fire Code

since contravention of any provision can result in serious penalties. As required by Section 2.8 of the National Fire Code, the owner of an institutional facility is responsible for the preparation of an FSP, which must be submitted to the Chief Fire Official for approval. Once approved, the owner is also responsible for implementing the FSP and ensuring that staff is trained for their respective duties. The owner is required to notify the Chief Fire Official when changes to an approved FSP are necessary, including a change in facility ownership, the addition of new fire safety equipment, facility renovations, and staffing level changes. A copy of the approved FSP should be available for the responding fire department.

The FSP includes an audit of all systems and equipment and lists the human resources available to respond to a fire emergency. The preparation and implementation of an approved FSP ensures optimum use of all life safety features in a building. The plan must reflect the various functions of the institution and the resources available for residents.

Identifying the essential components will assist evacuation in an emergency. This often involves moving residents in the immediate fire area to an alternate zone. If the fire cannot be controlled quickly, they may have to be moved to an alternate floor or another building. The extent of fire development, building layout, weather conditions, the health of the residents and other factors will dictate the need and

urgency for relocation. These decisions may have to be made swiftly when it becomes necessary to evacuate a building. It is important that a number of options be established in advance.

The plan must also identify the means of transport to be used and the agency to provide it. When considering arrangements for moving residents, it is important to recognize that it will be required on extremely short notice. Most municipal transit authorities can assist.

CONTENTS OF THE FIRE SAFETY PLAN

The following protective measures are to be described in the FSP and put into place at the facility:

- Emergency procedures in case of fire such as sounding the alarm, notifying the fire department, provisions for access by firefighters, evacuating residents, and confining, controlling and extinguishing the fire.
- The appointment of designated staff members and their respective duties and responsibilities during an emergency, including actions taken by supervisory staff in initiating any smoke control or other emergency fire protection systems prior to the arrival of the fire department.
- The method of training staff for fire emergencies.
- The frequency and means of conducting fire drills.
- The control of fire hazards throughout the building.
- Detailed maintenance procedures for fire protection systems and building facilities.

- The identification of alternate safety measures in case of a temporary shutdown of fire protection equipment/systems.
- Floor plans featuring the type, location and operation of fire protection systems, firefighting access and exit facilities.
- Detailed instructions for supervisory staff members on the use of any emergency equipment such as the voice communication system, the fire alarm system, smoke control system or emergency power system.
- Procedures for the use of elevators and the identification of residents requiring special assistance during an evacuation.
- Standard procedures to help the fire department access the building, locate the fire and activate smoke control systems or operate fire protection systems upon request. For large facilities it is recommended that floor plans showing exit locations be posted on each floor.

The effectiveness of an FSP depends upon a number of factors such as the number and mobility of residents and the number of trained staff members available to respond to the emergency. Other determining factors of the building include fire safety features, internal combustible loading, size and layout. Individuals who prepare the FSP must be familiar with the strategy of the evacuation.

The organization of supervisory staff must be well-planned in order to reduce the risks to residents and to the staff members themselves. This is especially true for institutional facilities that provide care for residents who rely on others for assistance.