



# FIRE SAFETY IN HEALTH CARE FACILITIES



Patients in health care facilities are especially vulnerable in a fire. Preventing fires from starting, and being prepared to respond if a fire breaks out, will save lives.

## **CONTROL FIRE HAZARDS**

[Smoking is the leading cause of fatal fires in health care facilities.](#) Many facilities now prohibit smoking, however if smoking is permitted, rules must be enforced. Restrict all smoking to designated areas or have smoking directly monitored by health care professionals.

Post smoking rules conspicuously and apply them to everyone – patients, staff, volunteers, visitors, and delivery people.

Provide large, deep non-tip ashtrays in designated smoking areas, and empty them often into metal containers. Don't throw anything else in those containers.

Don't let patients smoke in bed, and keep an eye on patients who smoke while on medication.

Never tolerate smoking where oxygen is stored or in use. Many patient rooms have oxygen tanks. This includes intensive care units, respiratory-therapy rooms, labs, and operating, recovery, and emergency rooms. Post these areas with **NO SMOKING** signs.

Faulty and improperly used equipment is also a cause of fire in health care facilities.

Clean lint and grease from cooking and laundry equipment, ventilator hoods, filters, and ducts.

Avoid using extension cords. If you must use one, don't overload it; consult the appropriate technical personnel for safety guidelines. Don't run extension cords across doorways or where they can be stepped on. Don't plug one extension cord into another, and never plug more than one extension cord into an outlet.

Have appropriate departments check and maintain all equipment on a routine schedule.

Be especially careful of equipment that patients may bring from home and follow policy regarding its use.

## **GENERAL FIRE SAFETY**

Keep combustibles – paper products, linens, clothing, etc. away from heat producing devices, including reading lamps.

Don't allow devices that produce sparks, including motor-driven toys or appliances, in areas where oxygen is used.

Store gas cylinders securely - away from patients. Cap cylinders when they're not in use.

Keep maintenance and storage areas clean and free of trash, sawdust, wood shavings, oily rags, and other hazards.

Keep halls and stairways clear.

Be sure that **EXIT** signs are always lighted and that emergency lighting is in working order.

Never prop open emergency doors. Fire doors not only let people out, they keep fire from spreading.

### **PREPARING FOR A FIRE**

Health care facilities should have complete emergency plans. The safety director or risk management director should supervise regular fire drills so all employees know what to do in case of a fire.

Things Staff Should Know:

- The location of fire alarms in their work areas and how to use them.
- The location of portable fire extinguishers in their work areas, and how and when to use them.
- How to shut off oxygen and other piped gas systems, if and when they're instructed to do so.

### **IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE**

- If a fire breaks out, stay calm. Set an example for patients.
- Report the fire.
- Move patients who are in immediate danger away from smoke or flames.
- Close the doors of patients' rooms, and any other doors to slow the spread of smoke and flame. Reassure patients who remain in their rooms.
- Fight a fire only if the fire is small and contained, as in the case of a wastebasket fire, and only if you have been trained to operate a portable fire extinguisher. Before fighting even a small fire, be sure that the area has been evacuated and that the fire has been reported.

Patients and their families have entrusted your health care facility with the safety of those who, in many cases, cannot help themselves. It is your responsibility to keep patients, staff, and visitors safe.