

## Fire Response in Senior Care Facilities

Fire and smoke can cause significant amounts of damage as well as potential injuries and deaths in senior care facilities. Several elements can contribute to the spread of fires and dangerous smoke and hot gases in the air, including oxygen deficiencies, flammable gases, plastics, volatile chemicals, and other hazards.

Senior care facilities are built to protect all residents, including those who are not capable of self-preservation. Building construction and fire prevention codes, automatic detection systems, fire suppression systems, and training for staff members are all essential elements that facilities need to have in place to prevent fires. Additionally, knowing how to respond to a fire and/or smoke condition is paramount to avoid serious injuries and potentially death to residents, visitors, and staff members.

Senior care facilities should develop comprehensive fire response plans or fire safety and evacuation plans that detail specific responsibilities and protocols. The following checklist contains numerous critical aspects that these plans should include. Facility leaders and staff members can use this tool to help assess their planning and response efforts.

	Yes	No
<i>Fire Response/Fire Safety Plan</i>		
Has your facility established a comprehensive written fire response plan or fire safety and evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan identify a predesignated emergency operations center and back-up location?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan review RACE (Rescue, Alarm, Confine/Contain, Extinguish/ Evacuate) and PASS (Pull the pin, Aim at the base of the fire, Squeeze the handles, Sweep back and forth at the base of the fire)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<b>Fire Response/Fire Safety Plan (continued)</b>		
Does the plan specify to close all resident doors, corridor doors, and windows and to shut off portable fans in case of a fire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan specify where the fire department primarily responds?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan specify an internal emergency number for staff members to call to relay the department/location and size of the fire before calling 911?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan include prewritten approval from the fire marshal for silencing the fire alarm once the situation is deemed “under control” by the responding agency(ies)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan address residents that will not leave their rooms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan address what to do in the event of a lithium-ion battery fire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan include removing all items from the corridors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan include the fire marshal/fire department conducting regularly scheduled tours of the senior care facility, observing, and providing feedback on fire drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan specify sources of ignition that should not be permitted in rooms where residents are receiving oxygen therapy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan clearly identify all areas in which smoking is prohibited?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan define general safety actions, such as stay low to avoid inhaling smoke and products of combustion, feel closed doors for heat, and taking appropriate actions if there is more smoke on the other side of the fire/smoke barrier door(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the plan include specific procedures for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People in the immediate area of the fire versus those away from the fire?</li> <li>• Fire response team members?</li> <li>• Healthcare providers, dental providers, and volunteers?</li> <li>• Handling disabled, behavioral health, and bariatric residents?</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<b>Fire Response/Fire Safety Plan (continued)</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boiler room safety (if applicable)?</li> <li>Mechanical room safety (if applicable)?</li> <li>Electrical room safety (if applicable)?</li> <li>Loading/storage area safety?</li> <li>Interim Life Safety Measures?</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Has the facility's chief executive officer, administrator, or executive director approved the plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the environment-of-care or safety committee review the plan on an annual basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your facility contact the local fire marshal, local fire chief, state fire marshal, and state department of health to review the plan on an annual basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your facility ensure all staff members (including healthcare providers, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dentists, and volunteers) are trained and aware of the procedures contained in the plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Fire Drills</b>		
Does your facility conduct fire drills to ensure all staff members know what to do in case of fire or smoke condition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are fire drills conducted on every shift once each quarter on a rotating basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members in the adjacent floors/smoke compartments clear the corridors as part of the fire drill?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the adjacent floors/smoke compartments observed during fire drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it verified that windows and doors are closed and portable fans are shut off?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are kitchen fire drills conducted annually?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the kitchen, are the main gas shut-off valves labeled for emergency use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<b>Staff Responsibilities and Training</b>		
Do staff members recognize the need for immediate action in the event of a smell of smoke or burning, visible smoke, or flames?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members know what actions they should take to ensure residents remain safe in case of a fire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members aware of primary and secondary exit routes, the closest fire alarm pull stations (and how to active them), the closest portable fire extinguisher, the closest electrical panel, and contact numbers for the fire department in case the fire alarm system is not functioning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members know how to move residents quickly and safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members know the physical and mental limitations of each resident?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have staff members been trained to use Med Sleds or similar patient evacuation devices?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members trained to move residents in the immediate area of the fire horizontally into the next smoke compartment? (Vertical movement of residents into a fire stairwell is possible but labor intensive.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members trained to <i>not</i> use an elevator in a fire emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a fire or smoke condition occurs, are staff members trained to call an internal emergency number followed by calling 911 to report where the fire is, what is burning, and whether any residents are trapped?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members understand the terms RACE and PASS and follow these protocols if a small fire occurs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If any appliance, tool, or piece of medical equipment generates sparks or smoke, or emits unusual odors, do staff members follow the RACE protocol and unplug the piece of electrical equipment if possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once the condition is mitigated, do staff members notify risk management and ensure the piece of equipment is replaced?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<b>Staff Responsibilities and Training (continued)</b>		
If any appliance, tool, or medical equipment results in a resident or staff injury or burn, is the device sequestered?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members close doors and windows and shut off portable fans, vents, hoods, and heating/air conditioning units in the immediate area of the fire or smoke condition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members taught to place wet towels around door openings, chute openings, and elevator doors to limit smoke travel if needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the facility have an overhead or other type of paging system used for “Code Red” or “Code Fire” announcements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are designated staff members trained to announce fire and smoke situations, including the location of the emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can staff members hear the page if the fire alarm system is out of service? Are fire announcements repeated three times?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members (including housekeeping) extremely cautious in areas where fires could be more likely to occur, especially kitchens, dining facilities, and laundry rooms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Extinguishers</b>		
Are all staff members trained on how to operate fire extinguishers at orientation and during annual training?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have staff members been trained to only use a fire extinguisher if a fire is small and to maintain their back to the exit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members knowledgeable about the different types of extinguishers in the facility (e.g., pressurized water, carbon dioxide, multipurpose dry chemical, and wet chemical)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have staff members been trained on the classifications of fire (Class A, Class B, Class C, Class D, and Class K), and are they aware that extinguishers are labeled based on the class of fire they are designed to extinguish?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<i>Extinguishers (continued)</i>		
When training staff members on using extinguishers, are staff members specifically trained on how to use a Class K extinguisher?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Resources

For more guidance on this topic, see MedPro’s [Checklist: Fire Response in Senior Care Facilities: Infrastructure Aspects](#). Another helpful resource is the National Fire Protection Association’s [Codes and Standards](#).

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This document does not constitute legal or medical advice and should not be construed as rules or establishing a standard of care. Because the facts applicable to your situation may vary, or the laws applicable in your jurisdiction may differ, please contact your attorney or other professional advisors if you have any questions related to your legal or medical obligations or rights, state or federal laws, contract interpretation, or other legal questions.

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