



ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES

Fire Safety Planning, Training and Drills

As Minnesota's senior population grows larger in numbers, so does one of the more popular alternatives to traditional nursing home care – assisted living facilities. Unlike nursing homes, which are subject to arguably the most restrictive building and fire regulations and undergo constant safety inspections, assisted living facilities are commonly built of woodframe construction, have less staff available to assist in time of emergency and are less likely to receive routine fire safety inspections. Steps **can** be taken, however, to ensure that residents are housed in a fire-safe environment.

The purpose of this guide is to acquaint the user with the basic fire/life safety requirements of the 2007 Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) dealing with fire safety and evacuation plans, staff and resident training, and emergency evacuation drills. Code sections that support the information provided are identified in brackets [].

Application

The guidance provided in this document is based on the requirements found in Chapter 4 of the 2007 MSFC that apply to assisted living facilities classified as Group I-1 Occupancies. To be classified as a Group I-1 Occupancy, a facility must house *more than* 16 persons, on a 24-hour basis, in a residential environment where personal care services are provided. All occupants must be capable of responding to an emergency situation without physical assistance from staff.

A word of caution...

It must be noted that this document is intended to serve as a guide only and is not intended to be all-inclusive. It is important that the user become familiar with the specific requirements of the MSFC. In addition, compliance with all items in this guide does not constitute full compliance with all applicable fire/life safety codes and standards. It must be further noted that county or state licensing agencies or local jurisdictions may have different interpretations of the codes and may also have additional regulations, ordinances and requirements that have to be met.

Fire Safety and Evacuation Plans [MSFC(07), Sections 404 and 408.5]

Just like a nursing home, an assisted living facility is required to prepare and maintain an approved fire safety and evacuation plan. This plan is required to be reviewed or updated annually or as necessitated by changes in staff assignments, occupancy or the physical arrangement of the building and must be amended upon admission of any resident with unusual needs. A copy of the plan must be readily available at all times within the facility and, upon request, must be furnished to the state or local fire code official for review.

Staff Training [MSFC(07), Sections 406 and 408.5]

Employees are required to receive training in the contents of the facility's fire safety and evacuation plan and their specific duties and responsibilities under the plan as part of new employee orientation and at least annually thereafter. Employees are required to review their specific duties and responsibilities under the plan at least every two months. This must all be properly documented. This documentation must be made available to the state or local fire code official upon request.

ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES ***Fire Safety Planning, Training and Drills***

Resident Training [MSFC(07), Sec. 408.5.3]

Facility residents must also be trained in the proper actions to take in the event of a fire. This training must include actions to take if the primary escape route is blocked. Where a resident is receiving rehabilitation or habilitation training, training in fire prevention and actions to take in the event of a fire must be part of the training program. Residents must also be trained to assist each other in case of fire to the extent their physical and mental abilities allow them to do so without personal risk. The code is not specific about how and when this training is to occur, but it's recommended that the residents receive instruction at the time of admission and at least annually thereafter. Many local fire departments are willing to provide annual training at no cost to the facility. Again, this training must be properly documented.

Emergency Evacuation Drills [MSFC(07), Sections 405 and 408.5]

At least six (6) emergency evacuation drills must be conducted each year, two (2) times per year on each shift. However, twelve (12) drills are required in the first year of operation of an assisted living facility. Since a lot is riding on the residents' ability to react properly under emergency conditions, these drills must include the complete evacuation of residents and staff to a selected assembly point in accordance with the facility's fire safety and evacuation plan.

Unless specifically prohibited by the Authority Having Jurisdiction or facility policy, emergency evacuation drills should be announced to the residents in advance. These drills are not intended to frighten the residents, but rather to acquaint them with the facility's means of egress and to serve as part of their on-going fire/life safety training. Complete evacuation drills also help facility staff and management identify residents who have difficulty hearing the fire alarm system or refuse to evacuate. These residents will very likely need special attention under actual emergency conditions.

Frequently asked questions...

Question #1: What requirements apply if my facility houses less than 17 persons?

Answer #1: Assisted living facilities housing more than five (5) but not more than 16 persons are classified as Group R-4 Occupancies and must meet the same requirements for fire safety and evacuation plans, staff training and emergency evacuation drills that apply to Group I-1 Occupancies [see MSFC(07), Sec. 408.10].

Question #2: If my assisted living facility is connected to a nursing home, but separated from it by a 2-hour fire barrier, is my facility's fire alarm system required to be interconnected to that of the nursing home?

Answer #2: No, the codes would treat an assisted living facility and nursing home that are separated from each other by a properly constructed and maintained 2-hour fire barrier as two independent occupancies. Each of the separated occupancies would need to have its own fire alarm system meeting the requirements of MSFC(07), Sec. 907. It is **recommended**, however, that the systems be interconnected to the extent that the activation of the fire alarm system in the assisted living facility will transmit a supervisory signal to a constantly attended location in the nursing home and vice versa.

For more information contact Robert Imholte, President, *Fire Safety Resources, LLC* at:

(Phone) 320-685-8559

(E-mail) RImholteFiresafe@aol.com