

# Fire Safety for Nursing Home Personnel

## A. Your Responsibilities in a Fire Emergency

Everyone has a role and responsibility in the event of a fire emergency, which may involve the rescue patients and others, assisting with moving them to safety, sounding the alarm, or just staying out of the way of firefighters and other designated emergency response personnel. **ALL HEALTHCARE WORKERS must know the institution's Fire Emergency Plan, the location of fire pull/call boxes, the location of and how to use a fire extinguisher, places of safe refuge and evacuation procedures, and must comply with the Institution's "No Smoking" policy.**

## B. Fire Emergency Plans

### 1. The R.A.C.E. protocol

"R.A.C.E." stands for **Rescue, Alarm, Confine/Contain and Extinguish.**

Each of these actions must be accomplished while responding to a fire emergency at any location throughout the Institution.

**"R"- RESCUE/REMOVE:** Individuals not capable of self-preservation i.e. patients, injured healthcare workers, employees or visitors, must be rescued from the immediate area of fire origin. This action must be taken within the first few seconds of the start of a fire. **Each healthcare worker has the authority and responsibility to take whatever steps are necessary to rescue any person in immediate danger.** Rescuing patients is every healthcare worker's primary concern and is usually performed simultaneously with activating the alarm (A).

- Rescue/remove critically ill patients in their beds.
- Ambulatory patients may walk to safety on their own with supervision.
- Rescue/remove semi-ambulatory patients first, then non-ambulatory patients.

**NEVER attempt to enter a room where a fire is contained without FIRST checking to see if the door is warm or hot to the touch. NEVER open a door if it is hot to the touch.**

Familiarize yourself with the institution's policy. Some may use additional processes including, but not limited to: (1) placing a pillow on the floor outside the door to signify the room is empty; (2) placing a wet towel along the bottom of the closed door to prevent smoke from escaping, if the fire started in this room; or (3) placing a towel on the door handle to a room where a non-ambulatory patient remains (not evacuated).

### Evacuation-

**Patients will only be evacuated with specific instruction from designated institution and/or fire personnel.**

Horizontal evacuation, which is the type of evacuation used first, consists of moving patients down the corridor, through at least one set of fire doors to safe area.

Vertical evacuation consists of moving patients down the stairs to a lower level of safety and ultimately out of the building.

- NEVER use elevators to evacuate a fire area.
- Evacuate ambulatory patients before non-ambulatory patients.
- Move patient charts with patients.

**ALL healthcare workers must know primary and secondary safe areas and route of evacuation.** This information is found on the institution "Fire Plan" which is displayed in all departments and patient care areas.

**"A"- Alarm:** Should you see smoke or flames, use the fire emergency call box or pull station. Dial the institution's emergency number and give the page operator your name, the phone number you are calling from, exact location (building, floor and room or office number), and state what you are reporting (sight or smell of smoke, or sight of fire and location).

If you discover smoke or flames in an occupied patient room, call out to a co-worker to call the emergency number and activate the fire call box/pull station while you rescue the patient.

Whenever you hear a fire alert, listen for the building location of the fire emergency. **If the fire emergency is in your building listen for further announcements and:**

- **Do not use elevators.** Only use the stairs.
- **Close all doors.** Reassure all patients, and visitors. If you need to re-open a door, make sure it is closes and latches securely behind you.
- **Listen for the all-clear code.** You may then resume your normal activity.

Once the fire emergency has been cleared you will be notified.

**"C"- Confine/Contain:** Fire, smoke and toxic combustion products must be confined to the area where the fire started as much as possible. Closing doors and windows can prevent the smoke from spreading, cut off the flow of oxygen to the fire and save lives. Confine the fire as long as no one is in danger.

**Never open a door if it is hot to the touch. Keep fire doors closed and automatically closing fire doors, corridors and stairwells free of obstructions.**

**"E"- Extinguish:** Handheld fire extinguishers (of the appropriate classification for the type of hazard likely to occur in the area) are located throughout the Institution. The most commonly used fire extinguisher is the ABC type and it can be used for most types of fires. If a specialty extinguisher is required in a particular area, you will be oriented to its use. Never use water on grease or electrical fires.

You should attempt to extinguish only small, contained fires (no larger than a waste basket), where your safety is assured, you have an escape route behind you, and a staff member or other healthcare worker is available to assist. The rescuing of those in immediate danger, sounding the alarm, and confining fire and smoke should be accomplished by other staff members or healthcare workers. Even if you extinguish the fire, the fire should still be reported by dialing the institution emergency number and sounding the alarm.

## **2. P.A.S.S. for Fire Extinguisher Use**

All fire extinguishers are labeled with the name or type of extinguisher, display in picture format the type of fire it will extinguish, and include operating instructions. All fire extinguishers operate in the same way-

**"P.A.S.S." (Pull, Aim, Squeeze and Sweep).**

**"P"- Pull:**

Pull the pin from the fire extinguisher handle at the top of the fire extinguisher. (Remember not to squeeze handles when removing the pin.)

**"A"- Aim:**

Take 3 steps back and then **aim the horn or hose at the base of the fire**, not at the smoke or flames. **You want to be about 8 to 10 feet away from the fire.**

**"S"- Squeeze:**

Squeeze the top handle to the bottom handle to discharge the extinguishing agent.

**"S"- Sweep:**

Sweep the nozzle from side to side across base of the fire.

**3. Fire Alarms and Drills**

Whenever you hear a fire alert you will not know if it is a drill or a true fire emergency. Therefore, you must treat it as a fire emergency somewhere in the facility and act appropriately. In the event of a true fire emergency, you must be prepared.

**4. Know the Location Of:**

- Fire Emergency Call Box/Pull Station
- Fire Extinguishers
- Evacuation Route
- Department Fire Plan