

Fire Safety for Healthcare Employees

R.A.C.E. Rescue, Alarm, Contain, Extinguish

There are four essential steps to take if you discover a fire: **Rescue, Alarm, Contain, Extinguish**. These four steps must be accomplished to successfully deal with a fire emergency. The order they are performed will vary according to the circumstances.

Rescue persons in immediate danger.

In a health care facility, rescue usually means moving the person from the area of the fire to another area inside the facility. The goal should be to get everyone out of the room, not out of the building, unless the fire spreads and evacuation of the facility becomes necessary. After the occupants are rescued from the room on fire, the next step is to move the people in adjoining rooms: the rooms on either side of the fire room, the room across the hall and the rooms above and below the fire room.

Alarm

Sounding the alarm is the quickest way to get help. It alerts other staff members and initiates the process that alerts the fire department.

Extra care should be taken by those working in high noise areas, such as the laundr room, to ensure everyone in the area is aware of a fire.

Most serious health care facility fires can be traced to a delay in sounding the alarm and failure to close doors.

Contain fire by closing all doors in the fire area.

When everyone has been removed from the room that contains the fire, close the door(s) to the room. Closing the door(s) accomplishes two things:

- The fire and smoke are contained in the room and prevented from spreading to other areas; and
- The sprinkler system will be activated sooner. (The sprinkler system is heat sensitive and activates when the air temperature reaches a pre-set level. The air temperature will rise faster if the doors are closed).

Extinguish small fires.

If the rescue, alarm and contain procedures have been followed and the fire department has not arrived, try to extinguish small fires, using one of the following techniques:

- Smothering it;
- Using a fire extinguisher; or
- Pouring water on it (unless it is an electrical or grease fire). If the fire cannot be extinguished, leave the area and close the door.

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

Every health care facility should have a complete fire plan. The facility must have regular fire drills so the staff knows what to do in an emergency.

Employees should:

- Know the location of two fire alarm pull-boxes in their work area;
- Be able to find and operate fire alarm pull-boxes in the dark;
- Know where portable fire extinguishers are located and learn how and when to use them;
- Know where exits are;
- Take care never to block an exit; and
- Know how to shut off oxygen and other piped gas systems, if (and only if) they are instructed to do so.

WHEN NOT TO FIGHT A FIRE

In the following situations, you should not fight a fire with a portable extinguisher:

- If the fire is spreading beyond the starting point;
- If it is already a large fire;
- If the fire could block your escape route;
- If you are unsure how to operate the extinguisher; or
- If you are in doubt whether the extinguisher is proper for the type of fire at hand.