



Smoking, carbon monoxide, and other items commonly found on assisted living survey by Engineering

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Fire Safety Tag Issues

Top items found on survey

- Smoking
- Hazards of Smoking
- Locking
- Carbon Monoxide Alarms/Detectors
- Fire Rated Doors



Each assisted living facility must comply with the State Fire Code in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 7511.

Safe Smoking

- Facility is responsible for safety of residents.
- Smoking outside is generally ok. Make sure cigarettes disposed of properly. MDH will cite for disposing butts on ground, mulch, rocks, deck, etc. Need an ashtray and/or receptacle to dump used cigarettes.
- Engineering will cite if there is evidence of careless use of cigarettes in the building. Many times, staff had observed cigarette butts on the carpet or holes in carpet from cigarette burns.

Smoking Tags

- Smoking shall be done safely, and cigarettes discarded into approved non-combustible ash trays placed on a sturdy surface. Lighted matches, cigarettes, cigars, or other burning objects shall not be discarded in such a manner that could cause ignition of other combustible material.
- Garages can be a good place to smoke or dangerous place. Not a good idea if you have gas cans, combustibles, parked cars, etc. We have seen many that have been safe.
- Don't dispose in piles of leaves, out windows (especially with leaves or bark).
- Dumpster not a good ash tray. Remember the focus can be on fire safety and not just compliance. Incorporate your smoking policies into your FSEP.

Hazards of Smoking & Oxygen in Assisted Living Facilities

- Recent Tragedy – Gabriel House Fire
- Massachusetts, July 2025: A fatal assisted living fire claimed 10 lives and injured 30+
- Investigators found smoking materials and a malfunctioning oxygen concentrator in the room of fire origin
- Concentrated oxygen dramatically accelerated fire spread



Why Oxygen + Smoking is Dangerous



- Oxygen isn't flammable, but it fuels fires—materials burn faster and hotter in enriched environments
- Smoking materials are the leading cause of fire deaths in the presence of oxygen
- Former cases show home oxygen fires often start from smoking near tanks/tubing

Recognizing the Hazards

- No Smoking Zones: Mandatory around any oxygen use area
- Clear signage: “No Smoking – Oxygen in Use” — critical to post in resident rooms and common areas.
- Visuals:
 - Danger signs highlighting oxygen hazard



Best Practices – Reducing Risk

1. Maintain no-smoking policies in and around rooms with oxygen.
2. Provide non-combustible ashtrays in designated, supervised smoking areas.
3. Keep oxygen equipment ≥ 5 ft from ignition sources.
4. Use oxygen firebreaks—thermal fuses that stop tubing fires
5. Train residents and staff to never smoke near oxygen equipment—a rule impacted by tragic cases and regulations.

Regulatory & Safety Guidance

- NFPA stresses no smoking near oxygen under all circumstances.
- Smoking areas must be carefully managed, with proper ashtrays and supervision
- Massachusetts now requires statewide safety audits and resident notifications, following the Fall River fire
- Strong “No Smoking / Oxygen in Use” signage
- Ambient reminders via posters, magnets, or tray cards in resident rooms.
- Ongoing resident/staff education reinforcing oxygen-safety protocols.



- **Update policies:** Ban smoking near oxygen equipment facility-wide.
- **Install signage:** In resident rooms, hallways, outdoor smoking areas.
- **Provide safe disposal:** Use non-combustible ashtrays in designated zones.
- **Train team:** Reinforce oxygen and smoking rules during all safety trainings.
- **Audit compliance:** Regular checks of signage, smoking area usage, and policy adherence.

The Goal is Zero smoke Related Fires

By treating smoking (and oxygen) as high-risk, and embedding clear policies and training, we can protect our residents and prevent tragedies—ensuring safety, dignity, and peace of mind.



Locking in accordance with MN Fire Code

- Fire code section 1010.1.9.7 details 11 requirements to lock doors in the means of egress (special locking).
- Egress control locking system shall have the capability of being unlocked by a switch.
- Procedure to operate the door locking system written down and trained as part of FSEP.
- 1010.2 GATES, Gates used as a component in a means of egress shall conform to the requirements for doors. Gate shall unlock on alarm.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms/Detectors

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Larger facilities:

- Generally, see CO detectors at source.
- If apartment has gas fired appliances, CO alarm in that room.

Small facilities (single family house):

- CO alarms on every floor and outside of every sleeping area in vicinity of the sleeping rooms.
- CO alarms in every room with CO producing appliance (gas fireplace, stove, etc.)

For SFM guidance, [Carbon monoxide detection in residential occupancies | Minnesota Department of Public Safety \(https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/sfm/fire-code/fire-code-information-topic/carbon-monoxide-detection-residential-occupancies\)](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/sfm/fire-code/fire-code-information-topic/carbon-monoxide-detection-residential-occupancies).

Fire Rated Doors

Fire rated doors:

- Cannot block or wedge fire rated doors open. Fire rated doors protect residents and prevent the migration of fire and smoke.
- 705.2.3, Door closers shall be maintained. Cannot remove closers.



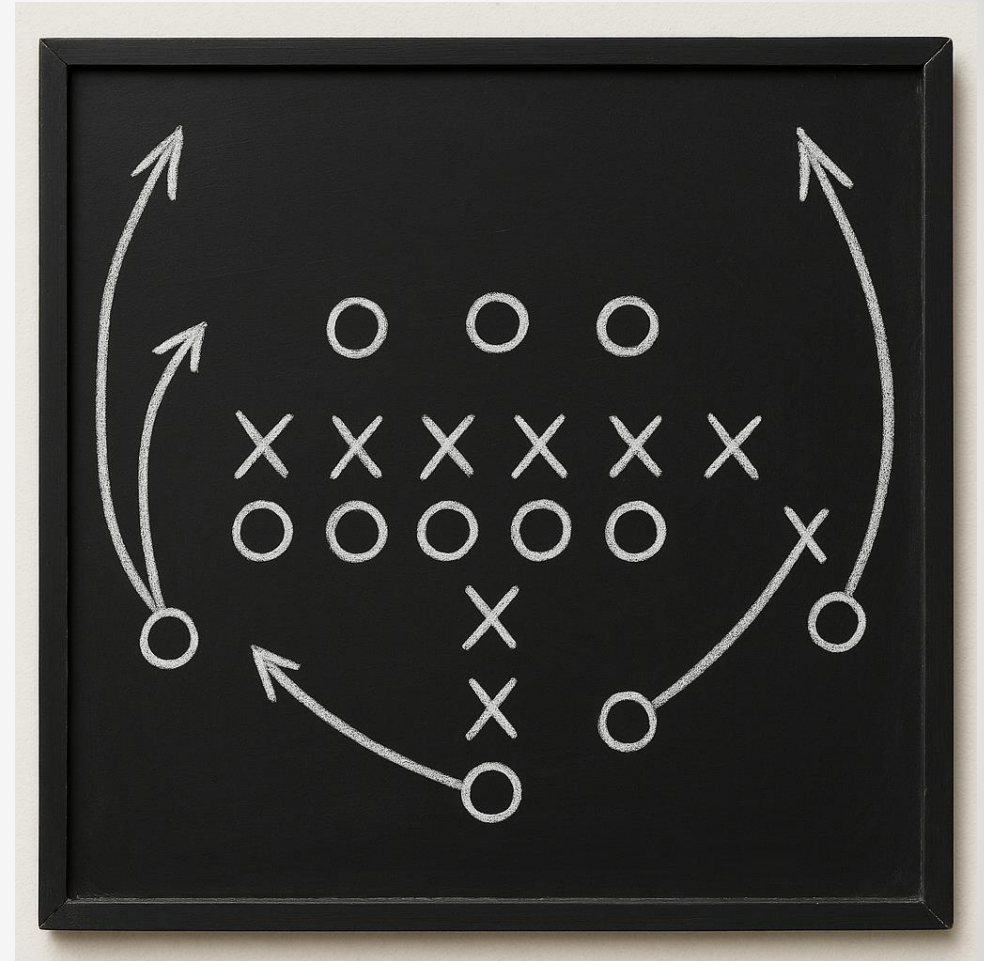
Different Occupancies in AL

- The license is tied to the entire building
- All residents in the building must be AL residents
- Some buildings have independent living residents sign a housing only contract
- Statute allows a 2 hour fire barrier to be a building separation



Fire Safety is Like Game Day Readiness

- Creating a fire safety and evacuation plan is like building a championship game plan
- We create the game plan (FSEP), coach our team (staff and residents), run practices (drills), and prepare to execute flawlessly on game day (emergency)



You Need a Playbook

Each assisted living facility is required to develop and maintain a Fire Safety and Evacuation Plan (FSEP).

The FSEP is a key document necessary to train staff and residents, so everyone knows what to do in the event of a fire or similar emergency.

- This FSEP is separate from the facility Emergency Preparedness plan.
- If the facility received/purchased a policy developed by a third party, you must modify/update the facility-specific contents.

Build the Playbook

Our Fire Safety and Evacuation plan includes the following:

1. Location and number of resident sleeping rooms.
2. Staff actions during emergencies.
3. Resident actions during emergencies.
4. Procedures for movement, evacuation, or relocation during a fire or similar emergency.



Coach the Team: Staff Training

Training is a lot like coaching.

Employees must be trained on the facility FSEP:

- Upon hire.
- Twice per year after hire.

Employee FSEP training must be documented and available during survey.

Drills are not FSEP training.

- Everyone must know their role on the court!
Walk through the training.
- MDH has seen in many surveys that staff do not understand smoke barriers.



Coach the Other Members of the Team: Resident Training

Residents are also part of the team. They have a part on the team and some can self evacuate.

- Train your residents at least once per year.
- What do you expect them to do?
- If training was part of resident meeting, keep minutes and attendance of the meeting for record of training.
- Learning the game plan equals performance.

Run the Drills: Evacuation Practice

No team wins without practice.

- Drills must take place twice per year per shift (2x3=6 drills per year).
- One drill every other month.
- Alarms or resident evacuation is not required.
- Practice sharpens our reactions!

Make Sure the Game Plan is Always Available

- The FSEP must be in central location, accessible to all employees.
- The best prepared facilities place the evacuation plan in each unit or wing if you expect staff to take the plan and implement it.
- If you have a locked memory care unit, having one copy in the area is a good procedure. Especially if employees are trained to stay with residents in case of any emergency, they will need the policy to reference in any emergencies.

Tips on Conducting Practice and Updating Game Plan (1/2)

Sometimes we see evacuation drills while staff are sitting in an office.

- Verbally announce fire and have staff walk through.
- Move items out of means of egress – preparing means of egress. Will see wheels may be locked or cart too heavy. May need to revise plan.
- Close any doors open that need to be closed.
- Do we know where closest fire extinguishers are located and when they should be used or not? Facility needs to evaluate their staff's ability to use fire extinguisher and train on what scenarios that they should use them in.
- On the drills, walk through your staff and show them the smoke barriers, smoke barrier walls and exit stairs.
- You will get feedback from your staff on what works and what does not work.

Tips on Conducting Practice and Updating Game Plan (2/2)

- Document the drills and figure out what worked and what did not work.
- Alter plan after your practice. Even practice moving residents if they need assistance.
- Include residents if you can. Have them participate. Tell them you are doing a drill and ask if they want to participate.
- Make sure your plan does not say to evacuate to your room for every emergency. Not every evacuation is in place. What if there is a gas leak? Tornado?
- Have fire department come out and participate with them. Walk through and get pointers from fire department. FD will tell you what they do and how they connect to the building. You may see your gathering spot is near the FD connection and it may need to be moved (example).

Game Day = Emergency

- Just like a game, emergencies test our preparation.
- Preparation starts with clear plan, trained staff, informed residents and regular drills.
- Execute like 'Champions' under pressure.



Thank You!

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