

Community Based Fire and Safety

Basic Dos and Don'ts

Fire and safety issues are of concern not because the state mandates annual continued education on the subject, but because they are issues of direct concern to the older adult.

Fire and Safety Demographics

Fear of fire and being trapped in a fire are serious concerns for older adults because of mobility problems.

Decreased sense of smell increases fear of undetected fires. With declining sense of smell older adults may not detect smoke.

Smoke inhalation is particularly dangerous in older adults with existing respiratory disorders or decreased vital capacity.

Burns may cause severe disability to older adults because healing slows with age.

Falls are a leading predictor of morbidity and mortality in the elderly, accounting for about 2/3 of all accidents in this age-group.

Nearly 1/3 of older adults who live outside a nursing home fall at least once a year, and an estimated 1/2 of those fall more than once. The incidence of falls is about 25% for persons age 70; 35% for persons age 75 and older. About 85% of falls occur in the home, usually in the afternoon or evening.

The majority of falls take place in the bedroom or bathroom and are related to going to or from the bathroom, transferring to or from bed, or leaning out of chairs.

Active people fall more often than inactive people, but those who are frail and have difficulty with activities of daily living (ADLs) have more repeat falls.

Older adults experience increased vision loss due to age related physiologic changes (requiring more light), difficulty seeing small objects and may have difficulty with color perception of blue, violet, and shades of green.

The first step in fire safety is development of a fire and evacuation plan of action. Make sure all employees, residents and family members know the plan. Then practice, practice, practice.

Smoke detectors should be placed per manufacturers' recommendations and State and Local fire regulations. The smoke detectors should either be hard wired or have a means to identify low batteries. Either way, be sure to check the smoke alarm regularly to assure good working order. Change the batteries when indicated by low battery indicator, and at least once a year. Pick a day you will remember and change all smoke detector batteries that day of the year each year.

Fire extinguishers (ABC type) should be placed as recommended by the manufacturer and per State and Local fire regulations. They should be serviced as indicated by the manufacturer unless the State and/or Local requirements indicate servicing sooner than the recommendations of the manufacturer.

Inspect electrical appliance cords for intactness and good repair, discourage use of extension cords and where absolutely necessary use only heavy duty cords UL approved for the wattage required by the appliance being plugged into the extension cord. Be sure to keep the cords out of regular traffic areas.

Do not use adaptors to connect three pronged plugs into two prong extension cords or outlets.

Never use extension cords in wet areas such as bathrooms, laundry rooms, or kitchens.

Where and when possible have GFCIs (ground fault circuit interrupters) installed in wet areas (see above).

Cover all outlets not currently in use.

Do not overload circuits.

Maintain all combustible agents locked in well ventilated areas away from sources of ignition.

If smoking is allowed in your facility, monitor residents who smoke to determine safety of the resident with the smoking material and possible need for supervision. Control all resident smoking materials under lock and key or out of reach to prevent an unsafe or confused resident from gaining access to them.

Know your residents, where they are and what kind of help they will need should evacuation become necessary.

Predetermine a safe meeting area outside