



Steven Hirsch & Associates
Healthcare Management Support Systems

Quarterly Fire Drills

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As required in accreditation standards and state licensing regulations, fire drills in hospitals are required to be conducted quarterly on each shift. In hospitals that utilize 12-hour shifts for nursing and other clinical care providers that also have staff in support areas working 8-hour shifts, it is prudent to conduct fire drills based on the 8-hour shift. This facilitates as many staff as possible participating in a fire drill, at least annually.

The accredited organization will be expected to define what constitutes each 8-hour shift. These most commonly are defined as Days (7:00 AM-3:30 PM); Evenings (3:00 PM-11:30 PM); and Nights (11:00 PM-7:30 AM). Fire drills are to be conducted once per shift as defined by the organization, each quarter.

It should be noted that fire drills in "Business Occupancies" are generally required to be conducted once per shift (when the location is occupied) each year. In some states, including California, state requirements do not make a distinction between occupancy types as defined in the Life Safety Code, NFPA 101. In those cases, it is suggested that fire drills be conducted quarterly, on each shift the "Business Occupancy" is occupied.

When conducting fire drills, be sure to consider holding the drills under varying conditions. The drills should be more than 1 hour apart each quarter, and the times of the fire drills should not repeat for at least one year. Also, fire drills should be conducted on different days of the week, including weekends. In addition, the fire alarm signal must be transmitted to the fire alarm monitoring station regardless of what time the drill is conducted, even between 9:00 PM and 6:00 AM when the fire alarm may be silenced in the hospital. Visual notification devices may not be de-activated for these drills.

When evaluating fire drills, it is important to recognize that various departments have specific responsibilities delineated in the Fire Response Plan. These departments include, but are not limited to Clinical Laboratory, Operating Room, C-Section Suite, Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory, MRI, Kitchen, Post-Partum, NICU and others. The fire drill critique should include evaluation of staff response according to the responsibilities as delineated in the Fire Response Plan for these areas. In addition, the evaluation of the Fire Drill should include observations related to fire alarm systems and structural features of fire protection (for example, fire doors) to identify any fire system components that may not function properly.

The evaluation of fire drills should be detailed and performed with a critical eye. It is through practice that staff response will be improved, and in an emergency, staff will be prepared to engage and follow established guidelines.

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