

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Resident Safety: Don't Let These 3 Common Practices Derail Your Fire Safety Record

Candles are verboten except in this one instance, says fire expert.

To prevent fires -- and citations -- take a look at how you handle these issues.

1. Holiday decorations and celebrations. "Decorations used for holidays should be made of non-flammable materials or fire-retardant materials," says **Bill Lauzon**, PE, a fire safety expert with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. "If staff or families bring things from home they may not be able to show they are nonflammable or flame-retardant." Sometimes facilities bring items into the resident's room that create a hazard, he adds.

Keep in mind: Occasionally people bring candles to the facility and light those, Lauzon observes. "But these are prohibited except as part of an established religious ceremony."

Also: "People tend to run additional extension cords during the holidays and can get cited at K147 if they have too many things loaded on them," Lauzon cautions.

2. Extension cords and power strips. "Don't use extension cords for microwaves, air conditioners, toasters, refrigerators, and any other larger appliance or equipment," advises **Ted Panagiotopoulos, CFPS, CFI II**, principal of Fire & Life Safety Concepts LLC in Wilton, Conn. "These must be plugged directly into a grounded electrical outlet."

Also avoid overloading power strips "and make sure that they are properly rated for the appliances or equipment that they will be used for," Panagiotopoulos adds. Don't put extension cords under carpeting -- or allow them to be crushed by heavy items, including furniture, he warns.

3. Resident smoking. Some residents who smoke may be "grandfathered" under a facility's smoking practice, says **Joy Jordan, RN, MSN, SMQT**, a consultant with Boyer & Associates in Brookfield, Wis. If so, the facility should perform smoking safety assessments that correspond to the MDS cognitive information, she advises.

The facility should also have safety practices in place, says Jordan, including supervising residents when they smoke. Allow smoking only in assigned areas, which are usually outside the facility, Jordan adds. In addition, all residents should wear fireproof aprons while they smoke. The facility should provide fireproof chairs and furnishings around the smoking area -- and "appropriate receptacles for cigarette waste."