

Solutions for Risk Management

Issues directly or indirectly affecting the senior living industry can change overnight. *Solutions for Risk Management* provides the latest news, updates, trends and risk management tips.

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Winter Weather is Here!

The past couple of winters have been particularly harsh for frigid temperatures and ice-related falls for visitors, residents and staff. Extra vigilance is suggested for sidewalks, entrances and parking lots.

If the facility has a service contract for snow and ice removal, review what is expected for service with the contractor prior to the facility's busy time of day. Determine whether salting and actual ice removal can be included in the service provided. Be sure to address all the building's entrance and exit areas with the contractor. Find out if the contractor has insurance coverage. If not, the facility's insurance coverage could be at risk.

In the building's interior, the use of absorbent runners and "wet floor" signs can be helpful. However, these safety measures are known to present fall risks, so precautions regarding their use are necessary. Be sure rugs or runners are of a sufficient weight and durability that they will not become a tripping liability. Put custodial staff on extra watch for needed cleanup of puddles which form after ice and snow have melted in indoor traffic areas.

When or if a fall occurs, the appropriate response is immediate medical attention in the form of first aid. If more is needed, call 911. Do NOT drive injured visitors, residents, or staff to the Emergency Room. Do not make assurances that medical bills will be covered. Report any events to the facility's insurance agency.

Finally, be careful out there!



Holiday Decorating: Look Above and Below!



Do you see any of these dangers in your community?



When and How to Wash Your Hands

It's that time of year again! With cold, flu, and pneumonia season upon us, it is the perfect time to remind residents, staff, and visitors of the importance of proper handwashing to minimize the spreading of infectious disease. It is also the perfect time to encourage participation in flu and pneumococcal vaccinations.

It is estimated that one out of twenty-five residents will have an infection annually. Hand hygiene is a critical component for preventing the spread of infection. It is imperative for health care workers to know when hand hygiene is indicated and to utilize the proper technique.

Indications for Handwashing and Hand Antisepsis

When hands are visibly dirty or contaminated with proteinaceous material, or are visibly soiled with blood or other body fluids, wash hands with either a nonantimicrobial soap and water or an antimicrobial soap and water.

If hands are not visibly soiled, use an alcohol-based hand rub for routinely decontaminating hands in all other clinical situations. However, health care workers need to alternate every third time by washing hands with an antimicrobial soap and water.

Decontaminate hands in the following instances:

- Before having direct contact with residents
- Before donning sterile gloves when inserting a central intravascular catheter
- Before inserting indwelling urinary catheters, peripheral vascular catheters, or other invasive devices that do not require a surgical procedure
- After contact with a resident's intact skin (e.g., when taking a pulse or blood pressure, lifting a resident)
- After contact with body fluids, excretions, mucous membranes, non-intact skin, and wound dressings if hands are not visibly soiled
- If moving from a contaminated-body site to a clean-body site during resident care
- After contact with inanimate objects (including medical equipment) in the immediate vicinity of the resident
- After removing gloves

Additionally, wash hands with a non-antimicrobial soap and water or with an antimicrobial soap and water before eating and after using a restroom.

Hand-Hygiene Technique

When decontaminating hands with an alcohol-based hand rub, apply the product to the palm of one hand. Rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations regarding the volume of the product to use.

When washing hands with soap and water, wet hands first with water. Apply an amount of the product, as recommended by the manufacturer, to hands. Rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use the towel to turn off the faucet. Avoid using hot water because repeated exposure to hot water may increase the risk of dermatitis.



The desired outcome is to minimize the risk of your resident acquiring an infection. Adherence to the facility's infection control program by all staff is crucial to having positive outcomes for residents, employees, and visitors. At a minimum, review the facility's infection control program annually. If you need assistance in best risk infection control practices, please contact RMS.

Reference: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Power Cord Safety

Electrical code violations are extremely common in many workplaces. But, in many cases, they are easily preventable. One common source of electrical violations is flexible power cords.

The National Fire Protection Association estimates that electrical fires, failures, or malfunctions result in approximately 53,600 home fires, causing more than 500 deaths and 1,400 injuries each year. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that private sector workers will suffer more than 2,500 electrical-related shock or burn injuries while performing their work each year.

Power cords are generally comprised of three layers. The innermost layer is composed of two copper wires used to carry an electrical current to an appliance together with the ground wire. Next, the insulation layer directly covers the wiring to protect it from damage and electrical faults or short circuits. Lastly, the outer layer consists of rubber or plastic that is molded around the wires and insulation for further protection from mechanical damage and wear.

Each electrical appliance power cord is evaluated by an electrical testing laboratory. Samples are tested in order to verify the cord is safe for normal use when the manufacturer's instructions are followed. The testing laboratory issues an approval or listing of the cord indicating that it meets applicable requirements. OSHA requires all electrical equipment over 50 volts to be approved by a recognized testing laboratory. It is incumbent upon the user to make certain that the power cord remains in a serviceable condition. It is recommended that users of tools or electrical appliances inspect the power cord before and after each use. This can help prevent personal injury or fire.

Power cords on electrical appliances that are moved frequently receive a lot of abuse. These include power tools, like saws, drills, floor polishers, vacuum cleaners, and other portable electric appliances. Many times damage will occur at the plug (e.g., a missing ground prong on a three-prong grounded plug). Damaged and ungrounded power cords pose a serious hazard to users of the appliance, including risk of electrical shock or fire. Missing ground prongs on power supply cords usually result from users pulling on the cord to remove the plug from the outlet instead of handling the plug directly. In some cases, the ground prong will be removed intentionally by the user so the plug can be used with an older electrical outlet that will not accept the third (ground) prong.

Another common hazard situation is the plug becoming pulled from the wire covering, exposing the inner wires to damage. Power cords can become frayed or damaged from heavy use, age, or excessive electric current flowing through the wiring.

Cord damage will often result when the cord is pinched, caught between, or punctured by heavy objects (i.e., mobile carts, legs on a desk). This damage could lead to electrical faults (short circuits) and result in a fire. Also, cords placed under stress (i.e., when a heavy appliance is hung by its cord) could eventually cause damage to the cord or plug. Covering the opening in the cord with electrician's tape is not an approved repair method. This is because tape does not have the same protective properties as the original (tested and approved) cord insulation.

Further Reading: OSHA Standard - 29 CFR 1910.303 and OSHA Standard - 29 CFR 1910.334



Winter Driving Refresher



Now that winter has arrived, it is an opportune time for some refresher training concerning the hazards of driving in winter. Time spent reviewing winter defensive driving tips will possibly help from becoming involved in a collision. All drivers can benefit from being reminded of the hazards and exposures they will face this season.

The number of collisions that occur during the season's first snowfall each year are amazing. It's as if every driver on the road forgets everything they have learned, and has to relearn that ice and snow are slippery – meaning we must slow down and increase our space cushion. To be proactive, review the hazards prior to the first inclement and/or snowy weather arrives in order to be prepared to slow down and increase the space cushion (by at least 1-2 seconds). This is also a good time to review antilock brakes (ABS) operation and how to use them effectively (maintain firm pressure, do not pump the brakes, and steer around hazards – disregard the pulsing felt in the brake pedal).

Bridges freeze up before roads because of the cold air underneath them. Slow down before the curve, not in the curve where an engine retardation or brake system may initiate a skid. Afternoon shadows cause wet spots on roads to glaze over, while sunny spots create dry surfaces.

Winter also brings shorter days and limited visibility. Gray days cause the need for headlights to be on more often. Headlights need cleaned more frequently in order to better see what is on the road and so other driver's can see us. Windshields need to be cleaned inside to remove film buildup that creates glare at night. Brake lights and other identification lights need to be kept clean to prevent dirt and salt buildup. Reflective tape on trucks and trailers need to be washed periodically so it can do its job of making the vehicles more visible.

Naturally, antifreeze levels and windshield washer fluid need to be checked. Air pressure in the tires also needs checked since the ambient air will decrease the air pressure inside the vehicle's tires, making them run soft and less fuel efficient. Check tire tread depths to determine if new tires are warranted. Check vehicle chains for any needed repairs and to make sure they properly fit the tires on the vehicle.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers these Safety TIPS for driving in winter conditions:

- Always wear the seat belt.
- Do not text or engage in any other activities that can cause distracted driving.
- Drive slowly. It is harder to control or stop the vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface.
- Increase the following distance enough in order to have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead.
- Know what kind of brakes the vehicle has and how to use them properly. In general, for antilock brakes, apply firm, continuous pressure. Otherwise, pump the brakes gently.
- If involved in a skid, stay calm and ease the foot off the gas while carefully steering in the direction the front of the vehicle needs to go. This steering maneuver may require additional counter-steering before full control of the vehicle is regained. Continue to stay off the pedals (gas and brake) until control is gained of vehicle.

During this season, remember to slow down and follow these simple driving rules to help minimize any involvement in potential winter-related crash situations.



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