

## IN CASE OF FIRE



**USE STAIRWAY  
FOR EXIT  
DO NOT USE  
ELEVATOR**

**FIREFIGHTERS OPERATION  
TO RECALL ELEVATORS  
INSERT FIRE KEY AND TURN TO "ON"**



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*Risk Reporter talks with Tom Heneghan, senior product manager of business continuity programs for the American Red Cross*

## Emergency evacuation plans can help save lives

Could your senior living center safely evacuate its residents in an emergency?

During the summer of 2012, a Midwest senior living facility found out the hard way that the answer was "sort of." Although no deaths were conclusively linked to the evacuation, three frail, elderly residents died within a week of the event and stress from the evacuation could have contributed to their deaths, according to Brenda Farlow, a firefighter/paramedic who was on the scene of that 2012 evacuation.

"That facility learned a lot of lessons" on such issues as communication, transportation and medication management, Farlow said.

To help avoid a similar situation at your facility, create, regularly update and practice a comprehensive emergency evacuation plan.

### Create a fire and life safety team

"Team makeup should reflect the stakeholders in your facility — have every major department represented — and choose people who can remain calm in an emergency," said Tim Spears, a fire inspector for the city of Colorado Springs, Colorado. "Residents might also play a role — for instance, as floor captains who direct people away from the elevators and to the nearest exits."

Colorado Springs recommended these roles, with alternates for each:

**Fire and safety warden.** They implement and maintain the evacuation and emergency plan, are responsible for ensuring fire equipment is in good working order, alert the fire department and meet responders during an emergency, train the response team and maintain an updated list of members.

**Emergency response team.** If safe to do so, this team investigates the source of any alarm/emergency and reports findings.

**Floor manager and assistant.** They help evacuate residents.

### Enlist the help of your local emergency responders

"Share your plan with police and fire," Farlow said. "Determine that your assumptions about their staffing and equipment are true. Ask for help creating contingency plans."

### Know and monitor your facility

Your evacuation plan should include a building description that details fire alarm systems, the alarm notification process, communication systems, exit pathways, elevators, utilities and shut-off, emergency

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## ( Evacuation plans )

power, fire protection equipment and smoke control (tempered glass, fire doors, etc.).

"Multiple staff must be familiar with these," Spears said. "You can't risk that the one person who knows how to shut off the utilities is on vacation."

**Create a facility self-inspection checklist.** For a suggested list of items to include, see Resources below.

**Manage resident data.** Colorado Springs recommends having more than one copy of the following or the ability to access this information from iCloud or off-site: medication binders, personal identification information, daily progress notes and medical charts, telephone numbers and an inventory of prescriptions and medical supplies. "Make sure you're in HIPAA compliance with any electronic resident information," Spears said.

**Plan ahead for medication access.** Create a backup plan with your pharmacy for filling prescriptions, oxygen orders and nonemergency items.

**Train staff members.** Colorado Springs recommends every employee know the following: how to identify, report and correct common fire hazards; the building's evacuation and emergency plan; how and when to use fire extinguishers; and two ways out of their work areas. They also should have — and know — their role in the event of an evacuation. Initial training in these areas should occur within 24 hours of taking on a new job assignment.

Help staff members understand the challenges a resident might face during an emergency. "We put thick gloves on staff's hands to simulate arthritis or smear Vaseline on safety glasses to mimic vision issues or insert earplugs," Farlow said.

Staff members and residents should know the importance of closing a door to slow down a fire, not taking the elevator and focusing on exiting the building — not saving their belongings. Residents should know how to exit every space

### Learning the hard way

Here are just a few of the problem areas encountered during the 2012 evacuation of a senior living center in the Midwest:

**Egress:** Emergency responders attempted to go up the same stairwells residents used during evacuation.

**Communication:** There was no interoperability among the fire department, facility employees and a private ambulance service.

**Transportation:** Not all evacuation buses were accessible for those with mobility issues, and there was no unloading assistance at the evacuation site.

**Medication management:** Residents who self-administered had a difficult time accessing medication after the evacuation because the facility had not created a contingency plan for them.

**Resident accountability:** Some residents left the scene with family; others were out for the day. It also was difficult to track who had already gone to the evacuation site.

in the building. Clearly mark all exit routes, keep halls clear of clutter and maintain emergency lighting.

### Practice and learn

The number of drills and when they're performed depends on which version of the fire code your region follows. Colorado Springs uses the 2009 version, which states that for residential care assisted living facilities, "Emergency evacuation drills shall be conducted at least six times per year, two times per year on each shift . . . (and) shall involve the actual evacuation of residents."

To avoid complacency, Spears recommends the following:

**Hold drills at different times of the day.** "It's challenging to wake and evacuate sleeping residents, but fires often happen at night," Spears said.

**Don't notify all staff members of a drill.** "If everyone knows this is 'only a drill,' they'll act differently," Spears cautioned. "You want a sense of urgency."

**Have a system for identifying empty rooms.** If conditions permit, the floor (or assistant) manager should go through each resident room to ensure it's empty. Mark with chalk or a hanger on the doorknob to indicate the room is unoccupied. (You also can use spray paint to mark a room/door in the case of a real emergency.) Pull the door closed but don't lock it. "This helps slow the fire but gives us access without breaking the door," Spears said.

**Have the fire "start" in different parts of the building.** All residents and staff members must know what to do if their typical egress route is blocked.

**Learn from the drills.** "Review what went well and what didn't," Spears said.

**Drill when there's significant change.** "If you change administration or have high turnover in staff or residents, you might need to drill more often," Farlow said.

**Document, document, document.** "This helps you track trends and is invaluable for pinpointing and addressing problem areas," Spears said. "It's also vital from an inspection standpoint. We need evidence you're conducting the drills and updating your plan accordingly."

### Call the fire department for fires of any size

"Your staff (members) aren't firefighters," Farlow said.

"Let the fire department come and ensure a fire is put out properly. They have the knowledge and the equipment. Smoke kills more people than fire."

**Note:** *High-rise buildings and those that also offer nursing home services often use a defend-in-place strategy rather than evacuation.*

- **Resources:** Colorado Springs Fire Department evacuation policies and procedures. For the complete document, visit <http://tinyurl.com/kcxsbwj>.





## Managing Your Risks

### Don't let hazardous materials go down the drain

Safe disposal of hazardous materials is essential when it comes to personal injury, property damage or harm to the environment. In most areas around the country, it is illegal to dispose of hazardous materials in the trash, down storm drains or onto the ground.

Some jobs at a senior living center might require employees to use products containing hazardous components, and there could be long forgotten, leftover hazardous materials sitting in storage closets.

Several types of hazardous materials need to be analyzed to determine how to properly dispose of them. Typical examples include paints, cleaners, stains and varnishes, batteries, motor oils, fuels, fluorescent tubes, needles/syringes and pesticides.

Chemicals flushed down drains, poured onto the ground or washed down storm drains can poison lakes, rivers and streams, and contaminate soil. Hazardous materials thrown into trash cans and then placed in landfills can seep into the ground and contaminate soil and sources of drinking water. Damaging effects caused by improperly disposed of hazardous materials have the potential to significantly impact the health of people, plants and animals.

Consult with your local government to determine how to properly dispose of hazardous materials generated by your senior living center. Most local governments provide hazardous material collection sites that accept specific materials, and they have the expertise to safely process and dispose of those items.

Make sure your organization has procedures in place for safely disposing of used hazardous materials. Also, double-check to verify that disposal procedures are followed. By doing so, you will help reduce potential health and safety issues involving employees, residents, guests, animals and the environment.

**Edward A. Steele**  
Risk Control Manager

# Seasonal Spotlight

### Beware of ice dams

They might be pretty, but the icicles hanging off the edge of your roof could be a sign your facility has an ice dam — and is at risk for extensive damage.

#### What causes ice dams?

Ice dams are the result of the perfect storm of building heat loss, snow cover and outside temperatures, according to experts at the University of Minnesota Extension. As the snow on a roof melts at higher elevations (where the temperature is 32 degrees or warmer), the resulting water runs down, hits a colder portion of the roof (where the temperature is below 32 degrees) and ice forms. As more water melts from above, it pours down the roof and could find its way into your attic, walls and insulation.

#### Stop the dam before it starts

"We highly recommend a preventive approach," said Patrick Huelman, associate extension professor at the U of M.

**Clear gutters of leaves and debris.** "Your goal is to keep water moving away from the structure as quickly as possible," said Paul Abrams, a company spokesman for Roto-Rooter®. "Leaves, tree needles, roof shingle debris and even cobwebs can cause problems. Flush your gutters and downspouts before cold weather hits."

**Adjust your gutters.** "As you flush the gutters, look for spots where water pools," Abrams said. "Sometimes the gutter is pulling away from the building."

**Make the ceiling airtight and check your insulation.** These two steps help keep warm, moist air from flowing between the building interior to the attic and then from the attic to the roof. "Call in a building performance contractor," Huelman said. "They'll pinpoint and address air leak issues and recommend any needed insulation updates."

Can't afford an upgrade? Talk to your local utility company. Utility companies often run programs designed to help fund energy efficiency projects, or they might be able to direct you to a state- or federally funded program that does.

#### If you have a dam

If a dam occurs, prompt action can help minimize or avoid damage.

**Remove snow from the roof.** A roof rake or push broom are commonly used to remove snow. Be cautious, however. Either tool can cause damage to the roof, and you also run the risk of injury from falling snow or ice, or falling from a ladder.

**Make channels through the ice dam.** When water is flowing into a structure, you can make channels through the ice dam, allowing the water behind the dam to drain off of the roof. "Hosing with tap water on a warm day will do this job," according to the U of M. This is only a temporary solution, however. For significant or repeated ice damming situations, hire the services of a licensed and insured contractor who specializes in removing ice dams.

■ **Ice dam resource:** For a more thorough overview of ice dams, visit <http://tinyurl.com/nvakk2g>.

# Q | A

## A Perspective

*Every senior living center wants to do all it can to protect residents and staff members in the event of a disaster.*

*Recognizing that many organizations struggle with disaster preparation, the*

*St. Louis Area Chapter of*

*the American Red Cross created Ready Rating™.*

*The program includes an assessment tool*

*backed by a variety of disaster planning resources. Risk Reporter recently discussed*

*the program with Tom Heneghan, senior product manager of business continuity*

*programs for the American Red Cross. To learn more about Ready Rating,*

*visit <http://www.readyrating.org>.*



### **Risk Reporter: Tell us about the program and how it works.**

**Tom Heneghan:** Disaster preparedness is like healthy eating. You know you should do it, but you don't always know where to start, and it's hard to follow through. Ready Rating™ delivers the tools to do both. The program's focus is assessment. It provides a snapshot of your present state and includes tools to evaluate and address problem areas. And it's not a one-time thing. To continue being a Ready Rating member, you have to improve your score by at least one point (out of a total of 123) each year.

### **Risk Reporter: Walk us through the steps.**

**Heneghan:** First, create a team and conduct an assessment. Include people from core areas, such as maintenance, kitchen, nursing and operations. Empower these people to get insights from key stakeholders so you have an accurate understanding of where you are in the preparedness process.

The assessment goes pretty quickly. There are 79 questions, but many of them have a simple "yes" or "no" answer. The process usually takes an hour or two. Next, assess your vulnerability. What weak points did you discover? What are you most worried about?

Follow with plan development. Focus on the areas either most likely to be a problem or, even if rare, that pose the highest risk. There often are simple things that take little time or money that really make a difference. Then train your staff members. Everyone — from your building and grounds staff to the medical team and administrators — needs to understand their role in the event of an emergency.

The final step: Ask how you can help your larger community. Conduct a public presentation on family safety plans or a CPR class, for example.

### **Risk Reporter: Is Ready Rating personalized to an industry or location?**

**Heneghan:** It's more general, but the assessment process lets you weigh hazards based on your geographic location and elements specific to your organization. For instance, your plan has to consider things like the physical and cognitive abilities of your residents, the impact of nighttime staffing levels and if you have medical staff. The resource tools on the Red Cross site help tailor your plan. One particularly good one is the Emergency Response Planning Tool.

### **Risk Reporter: Your program has had impressive results. Would you talk about that?**

**Heneghan:** The average improvement is 14 percent in the first year and 50 percent in the second. The most common actions include educating staff members and updating existing plans. Don't worry if you start with a low score — now you know how to improve.

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- Church Mutual supports the Ready Rating program. Visit [www.churchmutual.com/readyrating](http://www.churchmutual.com/readyrating) for more information.