Extended Power Outages

Principle

Each nursing facility shall strive to maintain temperatures in resident areas at a comfortable and safe level when severe weather disrupts a facility's normal operating procedures.

Introduction

State regulation (12 VAC 5-371-190. Safety and emergency procedures) requires that each nursing facility have an emergency preparedness plan designed to manage natural disasters or other emergencies that disrupt the facility's normal operating procedures. State regulation (12 VAC 5-371-370 E) also requires that facility heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems be capable of maintaining temperatures between 70° F to 80° F throughout resident areas. With the increase in severe weather patterns that result in extended power outages disrupting a facility's ability to operate normally, it is imperative that facilities be proactive in advanced planning to assure that resident health, comfort and safety are not adversely affected. Towards that goal, the Center has developed the following guidelines to assist facilities in enhancing their emergency preparedness plans to include extended power outages.

> An effective emergency preparedness plan requires prompt recognition of a serious situation, availability of an adequate, well-publicized and tested plan, clear assignment of responsibilities, and flexibility in plan implementation.

Definition

"Comfortable and safe" means an ambient temperature that minimizes residents' susceptibility to loss of body heat and risk of hypothermia or susceptibility to respiratory aliments and colds.

General Rules

A. Written policies and procedures shall be developed for responding to ambient temperature fluctuations outside the range defined in regulation (i.e., 70° F to 80° F). The Medical Director shall participate in development of the procedures, which should include identification of:

- Residents at risk or who have the potential to be adversely affected by temperatures outside the acceptable range.
- Circumstances that require notification of the Medical Director or a resident's attending physician, that require medical examination or other medical interventions, or that require notification of the local emergency services personnel, if available.
- Measures to be taken to assure the health, safety, and comfort of residents remaining in the facility.

- Available sites for relocation of residents, including identification of suitable healthcare facilities available to receive transfers if the temperature adversely effects or has the potential for adversely affecting the health and safety of residents.
- Sources of back-up auxiliary generators to insure an uninterrupted emergency electrical system.[1]
- Appropriate time frames for these actions based on the needs of the individual residents.

B. The facility's administration shall maintain a current listing of residents at risk or who have the potential to be adversely affected by temperatures outside the acceptable range. The measures necessary to assure a resident's health, safety, and comfort in the event of power outages should be recorded in the resident's medical record or Plan of Care.

C. There shall be a written plan and procedures for the transfer of residents to another medical care facility if complications arise. Such plans and arrangements shall include arrangements for an ambulance and the escort of the resident, when appropriate.

D. When temperatures are outside the acceptable range, the facility shall immediately evaluate the situation, monitor residents at risk, and take appropriate action to ensure the health and maximize comfort of residents.

E. The facility shall maintain arrangements with qualified contractors to provide emergency mechanical services in the event of an electrical, heating, ventilation or air conditioning failure or malfunction.

F. Repairs shall be completed or emergency power equipment shall be operational as soon as possible after the power outage.

G. The nursing facility shall notify the Virginia Department of Health when emergency situations that disrupt the normal course of business occur. Written documentation of each episode shall be retained in the facility for 3 years plus the current year.

Upon culmination of the emergency, the facility should evaluate the actions taken during the episode and update its emergency preparedness plan as necessary.

It is expected that facility management will exceed these measures when reviewing and updating their facility's emergency preparedness plan.

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[1] For federally certified facilities, the applicable Life Safety Code requires a back up power source for heating all rooms utilizing life support devices. The electrical systems are to be designed and installed according to NFPA 70 and NFPA 99. The allowable exception is any life support equipment used on an emergency basis as defined in section 12-5.1.3 of the Life Safety Code.