

# Fire Safety Advice: Aged Care Facility Managers



With infirm and often immobile residents, fire protection in the aged care sector requires both careful planning and technical knowledge. Inadequate or improper fire protection can expose patients and staff to dangers, lead to potential injury or in a worst case scenario, loss of life.

To help aged care facility managers protect against fire, Wormald offers the following advice:

**1. Conduct a fire safety audit to highlight potential fire risks around the facility.** This will help to determine the fire protection solution required.

- Hazards will vary depending on the aged care facility but can include medical equipment, kitchen or heating appliances, flammable liquids.
- Consulting a fire protection specialist can help to ensure all hazards are identified and the most appropriate fire protection solution is installed.

**2. Keep up to date with regulation and legislation.**

Aged care facility managers must know their responsibilities when it comes to ethical and legal fire safety requirements.

- Be aware of the national and state-based fire safety regulations and standards in relation to fire protection equipment, maintenance or training. It's a good idea to contact a fire protection specialist.
- Develop a fire prevention plan in accordance with *Australian Standard AS 3745-2010 "Planning for emergencies in facilities"*.

As of January 2013, the retrofitting of automatic sprinkler systems is a mandatory requirement in existing facilities throughout New South Wales. Similar requirements also exist in Victoria and Queensland.

**3. Install adequate fire protection equipment.** There is a wide range of fire protection equipment available from basic fire extinguishers and fire hose reels, to passive fire solutions such as fire doors and more advanced fire detection and suppression

systems. When deciding on the most suitable fire protection solutions, considerations include:

- Legislation and standards
- Size and type of building
- Materials being handled

**4. Service and maintain.** When it comes to fire protection, a high level of reliability is essential. Fire protection systems and equipment should always perform to the standard to which they were originally designed and installed.

- Regular testing can validate the functionality of fire protection systems and equipment and help uncover any faults or issues that may cause malfunction.
- *Australian Standard AS 1851-2012-Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment* recommends that fire protection systems be regularly inspected.

**5. Provide appropriate signage for all hazards, fire protection equipment and emergency exits.**

- Fire extinguishers and other fire safety equipment should be clearly marked.
- Emergency exit signs should be visible so that in the event of an evacuation, all building occupants, including less mobile residents can be directed to escape quickly.

**6. Train:** A confident team that is able to respond appropriately in the event of a fire is an invaluable investment and can substantially reduce the impact of a crisis.

- Hospital staff should know how to respond to a fire emergency and how to use the fire equipment onsite.
- Fire safety training can be included in staff induction where new employees are briefed and trained on what to do in the event of a fire.
- Fire wardens should be fully trained on their responsibilities, fire equipment and the emergency warning and communication systems in their premises.