



## **Fire Safety in Homes for the Elderly - Half Day Seminar 28<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

The Healthcare Standards Directorate held a half day seminar 28<sup>th</sup> December 2016 at Mount Carmel training center on fire safety for both Public and Private Homes for the Elderly in Malta and Gozo. The main audience consisted of home managers and employees of the homes.



Decreased mobility, vision, hearing or cognitive capabilities may limit a person's ability to take the quick action necessary to escape during a fire emergency. According to the Confederation of Fire Protection Association Europe (CFPA-Europe), people over the age of 65 are twice as likely to suffer injuries or lose their lives in fires compared to the population-at-large.

Several issues with regards to fire safety in Homes for the Elderly were addressed during this seminar. Some of the fire safety issues for Homes of the Elderly discussed included:

- Mobility impairments in clients
- Blind/visually impaired clients
- Hearing impaired clients
- Clients suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia

The seminar was introduced by the Director for Healthcare Standards: Ms Patricia Galea, followed by a talk delivered by Mr. James Newell, a senior official from the Civil Protection Department.



## Fire Safety in Homes For the Elderly

The following is a summary of the Fire Safety Guidelines for Homes for the Elderly issued by the Healthcare Standards Directorate. It is recommended that these guidelines be referred to for further detail.

### **Introduction**

Elderly people are known to be more vulnerable to fire-related accidents and injuries, due to possible sensory impairments, mobility impairments and medication side-effects among other reasons. Elderly homes have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of their residents, and this responsibility extends to fire prevention and fire safety measures.

Fire safety measures should include an assessment of fire hazards accompanied by measures to mitigate identified risks as much as possible. Key items include:

- Electrical equipment
- Gas burners
- Barbeque grills
- Extension cords
- Electrical outlets
- Gas heaters
- Flammable fluids and hazardous liquids/chemicals
- Candles, open flames, incense, hot plates, heating units with open flame or heating element (prohibition of these items is recommended within the Home environment)

### **Cooking**

Cooking should only take place within approved areas. If any residents cook within their rooms, home management should be aware of this and residents should be instructed to follow specific safety guidelines (see Guidelines for more details).

### **Smoking**

Elderly homes should have a smoking policy that covers residents, staff and visitors. Smoking is not allowed in public areas of the home or in residents' rooms. Any designated smoking areas should be equipped with ashtrays and matches, cigarette butts and ashes should be safely disposed of.

### **Laundry**

Laundry should be handled in a separate room equipped with 'No Smoking' signs. Regular measures should be taken to clear the room of accumulated fluff and lint as this is highly flammable.

### **Medical Gases**

Caution should be exercised when medical gases are in use as these can lead to an oxygen-enriched environment with greater risk of combustion. Contact with flammable materials and ignition sources needs to be avoided.

## **Doors and Fire Exits**

Emergency doors should be made of a fire-retardant material and undergo regular maintenance. They should open outwards. All emergency doors and fire exits should be kept accessible and unobstructed for easy use in an emergency. No sources of flammable material or ignition sources should be kept in corridors or doorways.

## **Storage**

Careful consideration should be given to the storage of substances, particularly combustible items, to minimize fire hazards as much as possible.

## **Public Holiday Decorations**

If the home is decorated for special occasions, it is important that any such decoration follows fire safety principles. Decorations should be made out of fire-retardant or non-combustible materials and should not obstruct any doorways or exits. Special attention should be paid to avoid creating fire or trip hazards with electrical cords, overloading of circuits or multiple adaptors.

## **Fire Safety Education and Training**

Such training should be provided to all workers to educate them about fire safety and train them in use of fire safety equipment as appropriate to their place of work according to the Occupational Health and Safety Authority. Home managers should ensure that workers are aware of emergency procedures including evacuation of residents.

## **Fire-fighting Equipment**

The home manager or owner should ensure that the home is equipped with the necessary fire-fighting and fire safety equipment. This includes but is not limited to:

- Portable fire extinguishers
- Fire hoses
- Fire pumps
- Wet and dry standpipe systems
- Automatic sprinkler systems
- Halon systems and other special extinguishing systems
- Fire doors, dampers and other fire protection systems and appurtenances
- Fire alarm systems

Relevant equipment should be regularly maintained up to the standards expected by the Civil Protection Department.

## **Emergency procedures**

Management and staff should know how to respond to a fire effectively by calling the Civil Protection Department and commencing the evacuation process. Every elderly home should have a fire safety programme with emergency procedures including:

- Procedure for raising alarm.

- Procedure for investigating automatic alarms.
- Procedure to call the civil protection and ambulance.
- Evacuation plan.
- Procedure to use fire-fighting equipment when it is safe to do so.
- Procedure for accounting for each person on the premises.
- Procedure for assisting the civil protection on their arrival.

In the event of a fire or other emergency, the home manager is responsible to inform staff of the imminent or ongoing threat and steps to be taken with regard to protection. In such an event, staff are advised to adhere to the following procedures:

1. Activate fire alarm system if it is not already activated.
2. Call 112 from a safe location and provide name, location and nature of emergency.
3. Alert management and other staff
4. Initiate Evacuation plan, if appropriate, using the nearest exit or exit stairways and close door behind you as you leave. **DO NOT USE ELEVATORS.**
5. Proceed to the common assembly area of the building.
6. Stay out until you are told to re-enter the building.

The home manager may not ask staff to resume work in conditions that still present a serious or imminent risk (except to institute protective or remedial action).