



Fire Safety Guidelines for Homes for the Elderly

1. Introduction

It is an established fact that elderly people are more vulnerable to fire accidents. The diminished perception towards fire can lead to serious or fatal accidents. Elderly people are more prone to suffer from diminished or complete loss of the ability to notice or act in case of fire. This could be due to sight, hearing, mobility and cognitive impairment, and medication used at night such as tranquilisers and sedatives.

Homes for the elderly are responsible for the safety and wellness of their residents. The person in charge of the home is responsible to take all practical measure to prevent the occurrence of fire and to ensure as far as is realistically practical the safety of the residents in the event of fire occurring. It is important that the home owners and home managers recognize the fact that fire safety is part of the service provided.

Fire safety involves a comprehensive process, of which prevention of fire is a fundamental feature. Effective prevention can reduce the number of fires although it is impossible to completely eliminate fires from occurring. Therefore, preventive measures should be in place to limit the damages of a fire and to take the appropriate action in the event of fire.

2. Scope

The scope of these guidelines is to increase fire safety awareness, to reduce the risk and number of fires, and to reduce loss of life, injury and property damage through education training and inspection as well as policy and standard development.

The Legal Notice 44 of 2002 on Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements) Regulations 2002 regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Authority [OHSA] in Malta is the primary reference used in the development of these guidelines.

3. Responsibilities

Fire safety is the responsibility of all persons including owners, management, employees, residents and their families. Protocols and guidelines should be developed to help ensure the safety of all staff and resident. Due to the danger of injury or death





from fire-related emergencies, the roles and responsibilities of each person is described below.

3.1. The Home Owner

The home owner is responsible to make sure that the necessary support is provided to the Home for establishing and maintaining a suitable fire safe environment.

3.2. The Home Manager

The home manager is responsible for enforcing fire safety programs in areas under their control, correcting violations, and implementing fire prevention and evacuation policies as well as encourages and requires employees to participate in fire safety trainings and awareness programs.

The Home Manager shall designate workers as supervisors who shall be responsible for the implementation of the measures required for fire fighting and for the evacuation of workers. The names of the persons thus designated shall be entered into a register to be kept at the workplace, and the register shall be maintained and amended as necessary by the employer. Provided that the number of persons designated for these purposes, their training and the equipment available to them shall be adequate and shall take into account the size of the workplace and the nature of the hazards present therein.

The home manager is also responsible to provide residents with fire safety information. The residents and their relatives should be made aware of possible fire hazards and what to do in case of fire.

The home manager is responsible for the installation, testing and maintenance of fire protection equipment including fire detection and alarm systems, emergency lighting systems, and fire extinguishing equipment. A register of these procedures should be maintained.

3.3. Supervisors

Supervisors must brief employees on the specific hazards of their work area, on fire reporting and evacuation plans, and fire extinguisher locations. They will be exemplary in fire prevention and require them to participate in fire drills so that they become familiar with the area evacuation plan.





3.4. Employees

New employees, when attending the initial orientation, will receive an overview of the safety programs and should become familiar with the services. The orientation will focus on fire prevention techniques in the work area as well as what to do in case there is a fire emergency. Employees should comply with fire safety policies and guidelines, report any unsafe condition and receive training as required.

3.5. Residents, Relatives, and other Visitors

Residents, Relatives and other visitors should familiarize themselves with the fire safety guidelines provided by the home manager. They should refrain from practices that increase the risk of fire. The home manager or other responsible person on duty should have an updated list of persons who have entered the Home at all times.

4. Fire hazards:

Awareness of fire hazards is important in the prevention and in controlling potential risks of fire. Inspections and walk troughs especially in closed areas such as stores can assist staff to identify, control and mitigate potential hazards. Key items to address, but are not limited to, include:

4.1. Electrical Equipment and Appliances

Electrical equipment is a significant cause of accidental fires. The home manager must ensure that all electrical equipment is installed and maintained in a safe manner. If there is any doubt about the safety of electrical installations consult an electrician. Equipment brought into the premises by staff or residents should undergo testing at suitable intervals. A programme of planned preventative maintenance for all fixed installations and portable appliances should be implemented. The home manager should also ensure that instructions for all equipment are available and that equipment is only used for its intended purpose.

Furthermore, The Home manager shall ensure that all staff, residents and visitors are aware of prohibited fire or life safety hazards include but are not limited to the following:

- Gas burners
- Barbeque grills





- 240 volts extension cords
- 240 volts extension cords wrapped in duct tapes
- Duct tape wrapped around electrical plugs
- Electrical outlet with no cover plates
- Gas heaters
- The use or storage of flammable fluid, hazardous liquids or chemicals.

4.2. Candle and Open Flame Safety

The Home manager shall ensure that possession of candles, open flames, incense, hot plates and heating units with open flame or heating element are prohibited.

4.3. Cooking Safety

The leading cause of kitchen fires is unattended cooking, when the food or liquid overheats and catches fire. Cooking is permitted only in approved areas and in residence halls that have designated cooking facilities. Appropriate warning signs should be fixed in residents' rooms.

It shall be the duty of the manager to inform resident or relative who cooks in the kitchenettes of their rooms to:

- Stay near the stove or in the room at all times when cooking.
- If leaving the room, it is necessary to remove the food from the heat and turn off the stove.
- Keep all loose material and objects that can catch fire, including clothing, away from the heat and the stove.
- Keep the oven, stove, toaster, and grill clean – a build up of fat, crumbs, or grease can easily catch fire. Keep all metal or metallic items out of microwaves.
- Residents are responsible for proper use of cooking appliances.

4.4. Smoking Safety

The premises should have a clearly defined smoking policy for residents, staff and visitors.

- Smoking is not permitted inside any of the residents' rooms, bathrooms, elevators, lounges, dining areas and other public areas in compliance with the law.
- No smoking is permitted within any door entrances, operable windows, or air intake vents.
- Careless disposal of matches and cigarettes butts is a common cause of fire. Residents are continuously reminded to use caution when disposing of such items. Smoking designated areas should have sufficient quantities of ashtrays. These should be emptied at least daily in metal bins. Inspections of these areas should be made at regular





intervals in order to check for signs of scorch or burning and to ensure that smokers' materials are disposed properly and will not ignite other materials.

4.5. Laundry

Laundry should be kept in a separate room since these rooms pose a particular fire hazard. Mitigation strategies should be used to minimise risk especially if laundry is carried out in-house. No smoking signs should be put on display. Fluff or lint, which is extremely flammable, can accumulate in laundries therefore a schedule should be in place to ensure the removal of these build-up materials.

4.6. Medical Gases

The use of medical gases can produce an oxygen-enriched atmosphere that greatly increases the risk of combustion. The staff must ensure precautions when medical gases are in use or stored to avoid contact with flammable materials and sources of ignition. Fire and safety warning signs should be displayed whenever oxygen therapy is in use.

4.7. Doors

The employer shall ensure that emergency doors:

- open outwards;
- shall not be so locked, fastened or obstructed that they cannot be easily and immediately opened by any person in the workplace who may require to use them in an emergency;
- are appropriately maintained;
- Are made of fire-resistant material of suitable and sufficient fire rating.

The employer shall ensure that sliding or revolving doors are not used as emergency exits.

4.8. Fire Exits

It is important that all fire exits are left clear and hazard free at all times. This is particularly important because if a fire were to occur in these exits it would be particularly difficult to exit the residence. Items that are a source of fuel or ignition should not be located in any corridor or stairway. Such items include:

- Cooking appliances
- Bath chairs and wheelchairs
- Mobility scooters
- Upholstered furniture
- Coat racks





- Vending machine
- Gas pipes
- Electrical equipment
- Seasonal decorations and
- Combustibles such as refuse, laundry and catering supplies.

4.9. Storage

Careful consideration should be given to the type of material, the quantities kept and the storage arrangements to decrease the risk of fire. The following should be considered:

- Electrical equipment should be stored in a way to avoid potential source of ignition.
- Adequate space for equipment, furniture and wheelchairs.
- Storage should only be allowed in designated areas only.
- Storage space should be controlled and monitored.
- Separate storage areas for medical gases, aerosols, and flammable gases.
- Stacking of paper or plastic packaging should be in an orderly manner.
- Control and frequent disposal of packaging, waste and other combustible rubbish.

4.10. Public holidays' decorations

The Home manager shall ensure that on occasions where the Home needs to be decorated:

- All decorations and ornaments must be of fire-resistant or non-combustible material and approved for use.
- Artificial trees made of fire retardant materials or non-combustible materials must be used.
 - Trees and other decorations must be located so as not to obstruct exit corridors or the operation of fire protection equipment. Trees should also not be placed in any manner that could present a fall or trip hazard, impede egress, or block emergency egress from any room.
- Electrical cords should not be routed through or under doors, rugs or loose carpeting or across work surfaces. Routing of cords through these areas may cause damage to the cord and create a fire or trip hazard.
- Plugging lights into an overloaded circuit is not permitted. Multiple adaptors are prohibited. Instead, use power strips with a fuse or integral circuit breaker when extra outlets are needed.
- Decorative displays are prohibited in stairwells and should be limited in lobbies and common areas in the residence halls.
- No candles, incense burners, potpourri pots, or scented oil warmers may be used.





- Decorative materials like paper or cloth or any other type of combustible materials shall not cover more of hallway or rooms walls.

5. Fire Safety Education and Training

The employer shall ensure that workers are adequately instructed and trained as appropriate in the proper use of fire fighting equipment as may be required for that work place by the Civil Protection Directorate or other organisations approved by The OHSA.

The home manager shall also ensure that the workers are instructed on the emergency procedure including fire and evacuation of residents. The workers should also be aware of the role of fire doors and the importance of not wedging or propping them open.

6. Fire Fighting Equipment

The Home Manager or Head of Home shall ensure that the Home is equipped at all times with suitable and sufficient fire-fighting equipment and with fire detectors and alarm systems, as necessary, taking into account the dimensions and use of the buildings, the equipment they contain, the physical and chemical properties of the substances present and the maximum potential number of persons present.

Fire Protection Equipment 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

It is the duty of the Home Manager to take all necessary measures to ensure that all fire fighting equipment at the workplace is subjected to a suitable system of maintenance to the satisfaction of the Civil Protection Directorate.





7. Emergency Procedures

On discovering a fire, it is crucial that management and staff are able to respond effectively by calling the civil protection and begin the evacuation plans as appropriate. The home manager should devise a fire safety programme which entails a set of 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.

The Home Manager shall ensure that all staff:

- Know the evacuation plan of the building and where to find it.
- Know the location of all exits of the building.
- Know the location of emergency equipment (i.e., fire extinguishers, pull stations, emergency telephones).
- Know the location of the assembly area outside the building.
- Assist and participate in fire drills.

The Home Manager and staff shall be able to identify and help individuals that require assistance by:

- Teaching them the locations of exit corridors, exit stairways and designated areas of refuge.
- Plan an escape route.

List of residents assessed using a suitable assessment tool should be kept at all times in main reception areas close to the assembly area. This list should be kept up to date and available through other offices outside the

8. Fire Drills

The Home Manager shall ensure that fire drills are carried out as often as indicated by the Civil Protection Directorate for that work place, but shall in any case take due consideration of fire risks within, and the occupancy of that residence.





9. Emergency Evacuation

The Home Manager shall as soon as possible inform workers who are, or may be exposed to serious and imminent danger of the risk involved, and of the steps to be taken or are to be taken with regard to protection. In the event of fire, bomb threat, hazardous material spill, etc., staff are instructed 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 shall take action and give instructions which would enable workers in the event of serious, imminent and unavoidable danger to stop work and, or to leave immediately the work place and to proceed to a place of safety

The Home Manager may not ask workers to resume work in a working situation where there is still a serious and imminent danger, except for the purpose of instituting protective or remedial action

10. Conclusion

This document is intended for guidelines purposes only. It is essential that the home owner and home manager ensure the safety and security of the residents. Effective risk management practices should be adopted to devise mitigation strategies to prevent fire. These strategies can prevent potential losses related to property damages or loss of life. It is suggested that if in doubt the home should seek expert advice on fire safety practices.

