



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Full sprinkler systems to be required in Alabama nursing homes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabama will soon become one of the first states in the nation to require all of its nursing homes to have full sprinkler systems throughout each building. An amendment to the state's nursing home rules, adopted by the State Committee of Public Health today, will require all nursing homes that do not currently have full sprinkler systems to have them installed under a three-phase arrangement.

Currently, a nationally recognized *Life Safety Code*, which is produced by the National Fire Protection Association, is the basis for both state and federal regulations governing sprinkler systems in health care institutions. This code permits some nursing homes to operate without sprinkler systems in certain situations. The Alabama rule amendments will require all facilities to install full sprinkler systems, even if such systems are not required by the *Life Safety Code*.

"Deadly fires in other states have shown that we must offer adequate safety plans, including full sprinkler systems, to protect Alabama's nursing home occupants," Dr. Donald E. Williamson, state health officer, said.

Louis Cottrell, executive director of the Alabama Nursing Home Association, said, "The safety and care of Alabama's nursing home residents is our number one priority. Every nursing home in our state has an effective fire safety plan and nearly every facility is fully sprinklered. This plan will provide an additional level of fire protection for our residents. We are mindful of the tragic fires at nursing homes in other states and are committed to doing everything possible to see that such tragedies do not occur in Alabama."

Under Phase 1 of the new rule, seven nursing homes with no sprinkler systems, and nine nursing homes that occupy multi-story buildings with partial sprinkler coverage, will be required to install full sprinkler systems by Jan. 1, 2006. Phase 2 affects 30 nursing homes occupying one-story buildings that have only partial sprinkler systems. They will be required to install full systems by Sept. 1, 2006.

The final phase affects those 24 facilities that have only isolated rooms or closets not covered by sprinkler systems. They will be required to install sprinkler coverage in

those areas by Feb. 1, 2007. The new rule will not affect the 163 facilities that already are fully sprinklered, nor the four nursing homes currently having sprinkler systems installed.

The proposed rule amendment is supported by the Alabama Nursing Home Association and has no opposition. The state of Tennessee, the site of a deadly nursing home fire last year that resulted in 14 fatalities, recently enacted legislation requiring all nursing homes to have full sprinkler systems by Nov. 1, 2006.

It is believed that Alabama's three-phase approach will make it the third state in the nation to require full sprinkler systems in facilities where the need is most critical. The states of Tennessee and Connecticut are in the process of requiring sprinklered facilities.

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