Waiting Areas Open to the Corridor

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It is not uncommon for health care facilities to have waiting areas open to corridors. Facility managers should be familiar with the applicable provisions found in The Joint Commission’s Statement of Conditions™ and the 2000 edition of NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code®.

It is also important to understand which requirements to apply to your facility. According to the Statement of Conditions™, effective March 1, 2003, The Joint Commission has been referencing the 2000 edition of NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code® and all facilities surveyed after this date will be evaluated using this code. Buildings for which plans were approved after March 1, 2003 will be evaluated as “new construction” under Chapter 18 of the 2000 edition of the LSC. Any building for which plans were approved on or before March 1, 2003 will be evaluated as “existing construction” under Chapter 19 of the Life Safety Code®.

Relative to existing waiting areas, refer to the following exceptions:

**Exception No. 1 of Section 19.3.6.1:** Smoke compartments protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system shall be permitted to have spaces that are unlimited in size open to the corridor, provided that the following criteria are met: a) the spaces are not used for patient sleeping rooms, treatment rooms, or hazardous areas; b) the corridors onto which the spaces open in the same smoke compartment are protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system, or the smoke compartment in which the space is located is protected throughout by quick-response sprinklers; c) the open space is protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system, or the entire space is arranged and located to allow direct supervision by the facility staff from a nurses' station or similar space; and, d) the space does not obstruct access to required exits.

**Exception No. 2 of Section 19.3.6.1:** In smoke compartments protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system, waiting areas shall be permitted to be open to the corridor, provided that the following criteria are met: a) the aggregate waiting area in each smoke compartment does not exceed 600 square feet; b) each area is protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system or each area is arranged and located to allow direct supervision by the facility staff from a nursing station or similar space; and, c) the area does not obstruct access to required exits.

**Exception No. 6 of Section 19.3.6.1:** Spaces other than patient sleeping rooms, treatment rooms, and hazardous areas shall be permitted to be open to the corridor and unlimited in area, provided that the following criteria are met: a) the space and the corridors onto which it opens, where located in the same smoke compartment, are protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system in accordance with 19.3.4; b) *each space is protected by automatic sprinklers, or the furnishings and furniture, in combination with all other combustibles within the area, are of such minimum quantity and arrangement that a fully developed fire is unlikely to occur. (This exception permits waiting areas to be located across the corridor from each other, provided that neither area exceeds the 600-ft² limitation.); and, c) the space does not obstruct access to required exits.

**Exception No. 7* of Section 19.3.6.1:** Waiting areas shall be permitted to be open to the corridor, provided that the following criteria are met: a) each area does not exceed

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30-Minute Limitation on Parked COWs

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According to their May 2008 issue of The Joint Commission’s Environment of Care News, TJC now has a 30-minute time limitation on how long computer carts or computers on wheels (COWs), as they are often referred to, may be parked in egress corridors in hospitals. Actually, COWs may not be “parked” in egress corridors unless they are “in-use” by facility staff. In-use is defined as, “…the cart is being actively accessed at least once every 30 minutes.” This is also true for other carts on wheels such as food service carts, housekeeping carts, gurneys, beds, and similar items. Two exceptions are wheeled crash carts (because they need to be immediately accessible during clinical emergencies), as well as isolation carts needed outside of rooms that have patients assigned. They may remain in the corridor with no 30-minute time limitation.

For COWs that are not in use, they may be placed in an alcove where they are not compromising the width of the egress corridor. The COWs may also be plugged in for charging their batteries. Those with lead-acid batteries that are sealed (SLA) and have an absorbed glass mat design and a sealed case are permitted. Also, all other battery systems including NiMH, Li+ ion, Li+ polymer, must feature overcharge protection and shorted-cell protection.

One final note, it is important that a hospital’s fire plan and training program address the relocation of any carts on wheels located in the egress corridors during a fire emergency. Also, according to the Life Safety Code®, Annex A.19.2.3.3, “not in use” is not the same as “in storage.” Storage is not permitted to be open to the corridor unless it meets one of the exceptions to 19.3.6.1 and is not a hazardous area.

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600 square feet; (b) the area is equipped with an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system in accordance with 19.3.4.; and, c) the area does not obstruct any access to required exits. This exception permits waiting areas to be located across the corridor from each other, provided that neither area exceeds the 600 square foot limitation.

In regard to the provisions for new waiting areas, refer to the following exceptions:

Exception No. 1 of Section 18.3.6.1: Smoke compartments protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system shall be permitted to have spaces that are unlimited in size open to the corridor, provided that the following criteria are met: a) the spaces are not used for patient sleeping rooms, treatment rooms, or hazardous areas; b) the corridors onto which the spaces open in the same smoke compartment are protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system, or the smoke compartment in which the space is located is protected throughout by quick-response sprinklers; c) the open space is protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system, or the entire space is arranged and located to allow direct supervision by the facility staff from a nurses’ station or similar space; and, d) the space does not obstruct access to required exits.

Exception No. 2 of Section 18.3.6.1: Waiting areas shall be permitted to be open to the corridor, provided that the following criteria are met: a) the aggregate waiting area in each smoke compartment does not exceed 600 square feet; b) each area is protected by an electrically supervised automatic smoke detection system, or each area is arranged and located to allow direct supervision by the facility staff from a nursing station or similar space; and, c) the area does not obstruct access to required exits.

I encourage you to take a moment to evaluate all areas open to a corridor for compliance with the above listed requirements.

* This exception permits waiting areas to be located across the corridor from each other, provided that neither area exceeds the 600 square foot limitation.
What Are Supervisory Signal Devices?

By Dean Samet, CHSP - DSamet@ssr-inc.com

The Joint Commission Standard EC.5.40, EP1, states that “Initiating devices and fire detection and alarm equipment are tested as follows: All supervisory signal devices (except valve tamper switches) are tested at least quarterly.” What systems contain these supervisory signal devices and what is their function? Actually, it is the automatic sprinkler systems as explained in the NFPA Life Safety Code® and National Fire Alarm Code® and as defined below.

Ref. 2000 NFPA 101® Life Safety Code® Section 9.7 Automatic Sprinklers and Other Extinguishing Equipment 9.7.2.1* Supervisory Signals. Where supervised automatic sprinkler systems are required by another section of this Code, supervisory attachments shall be installed and monitored for integrity in accordance with NFPA 72®, National Fire Alarm Code®, and a distinctive supervisory signal shall be provided to indicate a condition that would impair the satisfactory operation of the sprinkler system. System components and parameters that shall be monitored shall include, but shall not be limited to, control valves, fire pump power supplies and running conditions, water tank levels and temperatures, tank pressure, and air pressure on dry-pipe valves. Supervisory signals shall sound and shall be displayed either at a location within the protected building that is constantly attended by qualified personnel or at an approved, remotely located receiving facility.

*Annex A.9.7.2.1 NFPA 72®, National Fire Alarm Code®, provides details of standard practice in sprinkler supervision. Subject to the approval of the authority having jurisdiction, sprinkler supervision is also permitted to be provided by direct connection to municipal fire departments or, in the case of very large establishments, to a private headquarters providing similar functions. NFPA 72®, National Fire Alarm Code®, covers such matters. (Where municipal fire alarm systems are involved, reference should also be made to NFPA 1221, Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems.)

9.7.2.2 Alarm Signal Transmission. Where supervision of automatic sprinkler systems is provided in accordance with another provision of this Code, waterflow alarms shall be transmitted to an approved, proprietary alarm-receiving facility, a remote station, a central station, or the fire department. Such connection shall be in accordance with 9.6.1.3.

Ref. 1999 NFPA 72® National Fire Alarm Code® Chapter 3 Definitions: 3.3.88.2 Automatic Extinguishing System Supervisory Device. A device that responds to abnormal conditions that could affect the proper operation of an automatic sprinkler system or other fire extinguishing system(s) or suppression system(s), including, but not limited to, control valves, pressure levels, liquid agent levels and temperatures, pump power and running, engine temperature and overspeed, and room temperature.

3.3.88.5 Supervisory Signal-Initiating Device. An initiating device such as a valve supervisory switch, water level indicator, or low air pressure switch on a dry-pipe sprinkler system in which the change of state signals an off-normal condition and its restoration to normal of a fire protection or life safety system; or a need for action in connection with guard tours, fire suppression systems or equipment, or maintenance features of related systems.

3.3.67 Fire Alarm System. A system or portion of a combination system that consists of components and circuits arranged to monitor and annunciate the status of fire alarm or supervisory signal-initiating devices and to initiate the appropriate response to those signals. (Continued on page 4)
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3.3.88 Initiating Device. A system component that originates transmission of a change-of-state condition, such as in a smoke detector, manual fire alarm box, or supervisory switch.

3.3.171.4 Fire Alarm Signal. A signal initiated by a fire alarm-initiating device such as a manual fire alarm box, automatic fire detector, water flow switch, or other device in which activation is indicative of the presence of a fire or fire signature.

Note: The above requirements are to be applied where supervised automatic sprinkler systems are required by another section of the Life Safety Code®. As always, please review the entire applicable sections of the National Fire Protection Association Codes and The Joint Commission standards.

Look for these articles in publication
“Hot Issue: Maintaining Fire Rated Doors,” Maintenance Solutions, June 2008

Speaking Engagements/Seminars in 2008
November 20 Colorado Association of Hospital Engineers & Directors, Denver, CO, “TJC Newly Expanded 2008 Emergency Management Standards”

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