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NFPA Publishes Final Tentative Interim Amendment to Allow Alcohol-Based Hand Rubs in Healthcare Facilities

On April 28, 2004 the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) announced the amendment of the 2000 and 2003 editions of the Life Safety Code (LSC) to specifically recognize and permit the use of alcohol-based hand rub solutions in patient rooms, corridors, and suites of healthcare facilities. The LSC is enforced by a number of regulatory and compliance organizations including the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), and many state and local Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs) (i.e. Base Fire Marshal). **This amendment to the LSC becomes effective on 5 May 2004.**

Adoption of this tentative interim amendment (TIA) provides AHJs with clear code language required to allow the use of these hand rubs. By providing detailed criteria on the use and storage of alcohol-based hand rubs, the TIA provides guidance to minimize any potential fire risk while allowing hand rub dispensers to be located in convenient locations to maximize access and use by healthcare workers.

The adoption of the TIA is the result of a year-long advocacy effort that was led by the American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE) of the American Hospital Association (AHA) in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Association for Professionals in Infection Control Inc. (APIC), JCAHO, the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, Inc. (SHEA), and other members of the infection control and fire safety community.

According to the CDC, Healthcare-Acquired Infections (HAI) strike nearly two million people each year, leading to roughly 88,000 deaths per year. To combat this problem, in October 2002 the CDC issued recommendations stating that "alcohol-based hand rubs may be a better option than traditional hand washing with plain soap and water." Additionally the JCAHO established National Patient Safety Goals to focus attention on the reduction of HAIs by calling for hospitals to follow the CDC recommendations. However, health care facilities ran into problems installing dispensers since national and local fire codes restrict the location and use of flammable liquids, such as the alcohol based rubs.

In July 2003 ASHE, AHA, CDC, APIC, JCAHO, SHEA, and other members of the healthcare and fire safety communities, including state fire marshals, met to address the HAI issue. While it was agreed upon that in theory, the use of alcohol-based hand rubs had an impact on infection rates, it was noted that current fire codes restricted the use and storage of flammable liquids. During the course of the meeting ASHE provided the results of a fire safety engineering study they had commissioned to determine how alcohol-based hand rub dispensers could be safely installed and managed in corridors. The review and acceptance of the findings of the study led to the development of the exact code language of the TIA.

The TIA allows the installation of alcohol hand rub dispensers in egress corridors provided that the following conditions are met:

- **The egress corridor width is 6 feet or greater and dispensers are separated at least 4 feet apart**
- **The maximum individual dispenser fluid capacity is 1.2 liters for dispensers in rooms, corridors, and areas open to corridors, and 2.0 liters for dispensers in suites of rooms**
- **The dispensers are not installed over or directly adjacent to electrical outlets and switches**
- **In locations with carpeted floor coverings, dispensers installed directly over carpeted surfaces are permitted only in sprinklered smoke compartments**
- **Each smoke compartment may contain a maximum aggregate of 10 gallons of alcohol-based hand rub solution in dispensers and a maximum of 5 gallons in storage**

This is a significant step toward allowing hospitals convenient access to life-saving alcohol hand rubs, but it is not the final step. The International Code Council (ICC) publishes the International Fire Code (and companion International Building Code), which are referenced by many state and local fire agencies. ASHE has collaborated with the ICC task force charged with investigating and providing recommendations regarding the safe usage of alcohol-based hand rubs. The task group is comprised of fire marshals, hospital engineers, and industry experts and is moving forward with a strong sense of what best meets the patients, clinical, and fire safety needs. If amended, this action paves the way for state agencies to also allow dispensers in corridors effectively getting national, state, and local fire agencies all on the same page on the issue of alcohol-based hand rubs.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, do not hesitate to contact the HFD's Facility Management Branch. (AFMSA/SGSF, Capt Thomas (Scott) VanDerhoof, DSN 240-4145, commercial 210 536-4145 thomas.vanderhoof@brooks.af.mil)