



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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All Alabama nursing homes now have sprinkler systems

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabama is among the first states in the nation to have automatic fire sprinkler systems throughout every nursing home. Although the *Life Safety Code* allowed existing nursing homes to remain unsprinklered under certain circumstances, the State Board of Health, by an amendment in 2004 to the nursing facilities licensure rule, required all nursing homes to have complete sprinkler systems. In 2004, 74 of Alabama's 242 nursing homes had no sprinkler systems or partial sprinkler systems. Now, all 74 homes have installed full fire sprinkler systems.

In recent years, two catastrophic nursing home fires in Connecticut and Tennessee claimed the lives of over 30 elderly residents. No fire sprinklers were installed in either nursing home. The National Fire Protection Association indicated that it has no record of more than two individuals dying from a fire in a building that had a working fire sprinkler system.

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

Eddie Jackson, president of the Alabama Nursing Home Association, said, "The safety and care of Alabama's nursing home residents is our number one priority. Nursing home fires in Connecticut, North Carolina and Tennessee have become a constant reminder of the need to fully sprinkler all nursing homes. This achievement is a sign of the dedication Alabama nursing homes have to the safety and protection of the nearly 24,000 Alabama nursing home residents."

Enforcement of fire safety standards is critically important because many nursing home residents have mental and physical disabilities. Some are bed-bound, some use wheelchairs, and many have dementia or other conditions that limit their ability to run, walk or even follow instructions in an emergency. Sprinklers also help protect nursing home workers. Sprinklers are activated individually by heat from a fire.

The Alabama Department of Public Health's Technical Services Unit and Division of Health Provider Standards conduct surveys of health care facilities throughout Alabama. If facilities are found to be noncompliant with federal and state regulations, a corrective action plan is required. Follow-up visits verify that actions have been implemented to correct cited deficiencies. Complaints against health care facilities are investigated and appropriate actions are taken based on their investigative findings.

All of Alabama's 313 assisted living facilities and specialty care assisted living facilities also sprinklered, with the exception of eight facilities which have fewer than four beds. For more information visit www.adph.org/healthcarefacilities/.

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