




Regulations for Backup Cooling in Florida Assisted Living Facilities

A Step-by-Step Guide



Regulations for Backup Cooling in Florida Assisted Living Facilities

A Step-by-Step Guide

You've probably heard about the newly issued rules for backup cooling and power in Florida nursing homes. And if you're the owner of one of those assisted living homes, I'm sure you're wondering: How exactly do I comply with these new regulations?

Well, you've come to the right place! We've done the research to create this step-by-step guide so you know exactly what is required in terms of backup power in Florida nursing homes. The following steps will explain what the new requirements are, what you'll need to comply with them, and how exactly you'll go about doing this. Just keep reading to find out more!

Before we get started, there are a few key points you should keep in mind. First off, you must be fulfilling each and every of the steps we are about to share with you by July 1, 2018. Yes, that's this summer! You could face fines up to \$1000 per day if your facility does not follow the new protocols. So use this handy guide and act now. However, if you are facing installation delays, don't panic. The state will provide installation extensions until January 1, 2019 if you find yourself in this position and apply for this time allowance.

In case you're wondering why this law was put in place, it was actually the result of an emergency situation in Hollywood, Florida. After the air conditioning was shut off due to Hurricane Irma last September, six residents of a nursing home died due to excessive heat exposure. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that you make sure your facility is up-to-date with the necessary generators and equipment.

Now that you have the basic facts, here is the detailed procedure you need to follow precisely to make sure your facility is in accordance with state laws.



STEP 1

Setting Up an Alternate Power Source for Cooling



One of the key requirements written in this new set of regulations is that the temperature of your assisted living facility must always be kept at or below 81 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 96 hours (4 days). You also need either 20 square feet of cooled air per resident or 80 percent of the facility's capacity for area cooled. For this to be possible in the event of a power outage, you must install a competent alternate generator. So how do you pick the right generator for your facility? First of all, it is crucial to buy a commercial generator, as they are much more substantial than consumer models. Commercial generators have thicker steel, larger engines, and are liquid-cooled with better electrical components.

When choosing your generator, your first priority should be to determine the necessary voltage. The power for your facility is likely 3-phase at 120/208 or 277/480 volts. When the power is functioning normally, a step-down transformer will convert this voltage into 120/240 or 120/208 volts, depending on the original voltage, and an electrical panel will be utilized to distribute the electricity. You want to make sure the voltage of your generator is equal to the incoming utility voltage, which can be found written on your main electric panel.

You should also consider whether you want a 1-phase or 3-phase backup generator. This is largely dependent on the size of your facility. In general, 3-phase generators are best for nursing homes, but if yours is on the smaller side with less than 17 beds, a 1-phase one should be sufficient. Be sure to hire a professional to install your generator, as this is not something you should take on yourself.

STEP 2

Keeping Enough Fuel On-Site



If your facility has 16 or fewer beds, you only need enough fuel to power the generator for 48 hours, but if it contains 17 or more beds, it is a requirement for you to have sufficient on-site fuel to keep the facility running for 72 hours. These requirements must be met at all times, so here is how you accomplish this. First off, the best design for a fuel tank is an above ground storage tank. However, when installing one of these storage tanks, it is essential to make sure you are obeying all relevant laws and guidelines.

There are four options when choosing the type of fuel to fill your tank with: diesel, natural gas, LP liquid or vapor, and dual-fuel. Diesel fuel is commonly used and reliable, but can be expensive for smaller-kilowatt engines and due to maintenance costs. Natural gas is cost effective for smaller-kilowatt engines, provides a longer running time, and has reduced environmental impact, but there are still questions about its reliability as it is a new energy source. LP fuel has similar benefits to natural gas, but the disadvantage is that you may face challenges when dealing with the system design. Finally, a dual-fuel system is the one we most highly recommend, as it is cost-effective for smaller-kilowatt engines, runs for longer, and has a reduced environmental impact without the previously mentioned cons.

Once you have chosen the type of fuel you prefer and identified the necessary size of the tank based on the above regulations, hire a professional to install your system. There are some safety issues to consider regarding the installation. Be sure there are no flammable materials near the tanks and post “no smoking” and “flammable: keep fire and flame away” signs in a visible location near the fuel supply. Install the tanks in an east to west direction, so the amount of solar radiation is minimal, and be sure to have a secondary containment area with the capacity to hold more than the contents of the primary tank, in the event of a leak or spill. Fuel can be deadly to humans and the environment, so it is important to take these precautions.

STEP 3

Installing Carbon Monoxide Detectors



Carbon monoxide detectors are crucial for nursing homes, as carbon monoxide poisoning can lead to a rapid death. In fact, each year over 400 people in the U.S. die from carbon monoxide exposure not linked to a fire. There are four options when choosing a carbon monoxide detector for your facility. You can install a hard-wired carbon monoxide alarm, a battery-powered carbon monoxide alarm, a hard-wired combination carbon monoxide and smoke alarm, or a battery-powered combination carbon monoxide and smoke alarm. The hard-wired options will also contain back-up batteries and will be connected to the backup generator, so either is acceptable in the case of a power outage. We recommend the combination carbon monoxide and smoke detector option, as this will provide additional warning in the case of a fire.

A detector should be installed in every bedroom in the facility. Also, be sure to write the date of purchase on the back of the alarm and replace the batteries every 6 to 12 months, updating the written date when you do so. The detectors themselves should be replaced every 10 years and you should clean all detectors with a vacuum or canned air yearly. You can either mount the detector yourself or hire a professional to do so. If you are installing the alarm yourself, note that a carbon monoxide detector can be placed at any height, but if it is combined with a smoke detector, it should be placed on the ceiling, as smoke rises. The installation process itself will be described in detail on the back of the package, but it essentially consists of drilling holes where you want to mount the device and using a hammer and nails to secure it in place.



STEP 4

Wellness Checks and Emergency Medical Intervention




Now that you know how to install all necessary equipment, you must also ensure your staff is trained to care for the residents of your assisted living home. Specifically, in an emergency situation where the power is knocked out, this means checking for dehydration and injury due to heat exposure.

There are several ways to check for dehydration, and your staff should be trained in a majority of the methods mentioned below. First, dehydrated individuals are likely to have low blood pressure, a faster than usual heart rate, and reduced blood flow to extremities, so monitoring patients for each of these symptoms is an effective way to identify dehydration. Blood tests to check electrolyte levels (sodium and potassium) and kidney function are also used to check dehydration, as is urinalysis. However, these are generally not performed in an emergency situation, as access to a lab is necessary.

To treat dehydration, it is necessary to replenish both fluids and electrolytes that have been lost due to excessive heat exposure in most cases. Over-the-counter rehydration solutions should be kept in supply and administered to dehydrated residents if necessary. Sports drinks with electrolytes and electrolyte-fortified water can also be given to these individuals.

In addition to the checks administered by your staff at the assisted living facility, you must also have a way to reach emergency medical assistance. A comprehensive emergency management plan should be updated annually and must include provisions for evacuation transportation, post disaster supplies, and a way to contact your local emergency medical services if a resident's life is in danger. It is also a good idea to reach out to the local branch of the emergency management agency to ensure that you will be able to contact them in case of a disaster.



STEP 5

Submitting Your Plan



According to the new Florida Laws for assisted living homes in emergency situations, each facility must submit a comprehensive plan by April 25, 2018. To do this, you must be aware of all the steps that must be taken, as described previously, but you should submit the plan before enacting these steps. The plan should include the information described earlier in this article. It must explain how cooling devices and equipment will be installed and used, as well as how refrigerators and freezers will produce ice and maintain cold enough temperatures for medicine to be stored. It must also outline how wellness checks will be performed by the facility staff and contain a provision for contacting emergency medical services in case a resident's life is in danger.

Even if you did submit a plan previously under Emergency Rule 58AER1, you will still need to resubmit if there are any modifications to be made, which there likely will be to comply with the new set of legislation. You can contact your local emergency management office, which can be found at www.floridadisaster.org/counties if you are unsure about whether or not you should resubmit a plan. Additionally, even if you do choose to keep your old plan in place without changes, you are legally required to send a notice to the residents and legal representatives of the residents of your emergency plan.

There are strict time constraints to follow when submitting your emergency management plan. First, you must notify your residents and their legal representatives that you have filed your plan for approval within five days of originally sending your complete plan to your local emergency management agency. After emergency management approves the plan, it should then be submitted to the Agency for Health Care Administration in under two days. Be wary of this deadline, as it only allows for a very short period of time between steps. Finally, within five days of your approved plan being implemented, you must reach out to the residents and their legal representatives once again to notify them that the implementation has occurred.

Now you know exactly how to follow the new Florida regulations for backup power in assisted living facilities and how to submit your plan for approval. These steps will help you obey the law and save lives in the case of an emergency! If you have more questions about the specific regulations, click [here](#).