

<b>Fire Policy Practice Guidance Note</b>		
<b>Fire Evacuation in Trust Owned and Occupied Premises – V03</b>		
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<b>Contents</b>		
<b>Section</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page No</b>
1	Introduction	1
2	Scope	1
3	Statement	1
4	Who is Responsible	2
5	Evacuation	3
6	Multi-Occupied Premises	7
7	Summary	8

## **1 Introduction**

1.1 Fire evacuation is an essential part of safety within Cumbria Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust Group (CNTW Group) departments, wards and community homes. The purpose of this Practice Guidance Note (PGN) is to set out specific guidelines to enable the CNTW Group to be assured that the fire evacuation procedure is clearly understood by CNTW Group employees.

## **2 Scope**

2.1 This PGN together with any associated procedures and guidance notes, shall be observed by all employees of the CNTW Group and is applicable to responsible persons and their nominated deputies

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### **3 Statement**

- 3.1 The CNTW Group are committed to effective management and control of fire safety in order to reduce the risks to patients, staff, visitors and members of the public.
- 3.2 The Fire Safety Advisors will actively assist all responsible persons in ensuring the fire risk assessment and evacuation plan is carried out satisfactory manner.

### **4 Who is Responsible?**

- 4.1 Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, every workplace within the CNTW Group must have a fire risk assessment and emergency fire evacuation plan, the job of carrying out a fire risk assessment will be delegated to a responsible person in each work area. Fire evacuation is the responsibility of the person in charge of the ward or department where an incident could occur.

#### **4.2 Fire evacuation – The Law**

- 4.2.1 The safety of all persons in the workplace in the event of fire is of paramount importance and in areas of sleeping risk and hospital environments even more so. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires that suitable and sufficient instruction and training on the appropriate precautions and actions to be taken by the employees in order to safeguard themselves and all other relevant persons on the premises.
- 4.2.2 This includes a procedure for safe evacuation in the event of fire or fire alarm actuation. This training should be conducted in the form of an evacuation drill to test the procedures in place and the competence of staff. HTM 05-03 Part A and British Standard 9999 recommend that the time period for carrying out such drills should be annually (six-monthly in patient areas). An emergency fire action plan will be available and such an evacuation plan should not rely upon the intervention of the fire and rescue service or CNTW Group Fire Safety Officers to make it achievable.
- 4.2.3 Department heads and other responsible persons such as Ward Managers and Team Leaders are encouraged to implement these drills at local level at a suitable time without the CNTW Group Fire Safety Advisors being present. The likelihood of a Fire Safety Advisor being present in a workplace at the time of an incident would be remote and because of this, persons in charge

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and staff need to be familiar with the procedure. The person responsible for implementing evacuation procedures is the person in charge of the work area where the incident has occurred, not the fire service. It should be remembered that the Fire and Rescue Service have no legal obligation to carry out fire evacuations.

## **5 Evacuation**

### **5.1 Introduction**

5.1.1 The basic strategy for fire evacuation in mental health areas of the CNTW Group will be reliant on the dependency of the service users and the number of persons in the premises. Service users with cognitive impairments such as autism, dyslexia or mental health problems will be especially at risk and will need to be monitored constantly during an evacuation in the event of fire.

### **5.2 Fire conditions**

5.2.1 There are three conditions of fire where evacuation is required or should be considered:

- Extreme emergency
- Emergency
- Precautionary

5.2.2 In cases of extreme emergency, there will be a threat to life or safety from fire and/or smoke. 95% of all fatalities in fires are caused through smoke inhalation therefore a total evacuation should always be considered. In these conditions the sequence of evacuation should be to remove those persons in immediate danger first then ambulant persons and then concentrate on the non-ambulant persons.

5.2.3 During quiet hours time to evacuate may be limited so a thorough knowledge of the evacuation procedure is vital.

5.2.4 In emergency situations there is not likely to be an immediate threat however any fire is likely to spread from an adjoining area. In these circumstances it may be acceptable to move service users and any visitors to a place of relative safety by progressive horizontal evacuation.

5.2.5 In precautionary situations, there will be no immediate threat to life or safety but there may be a fire related incident in an adjoining building or area. In these situations, service users and other persons present should prepare to evacuate to a safe area as a precaution until the situation is deemed safe enough for normal activities to resume. The decision whether to move persons

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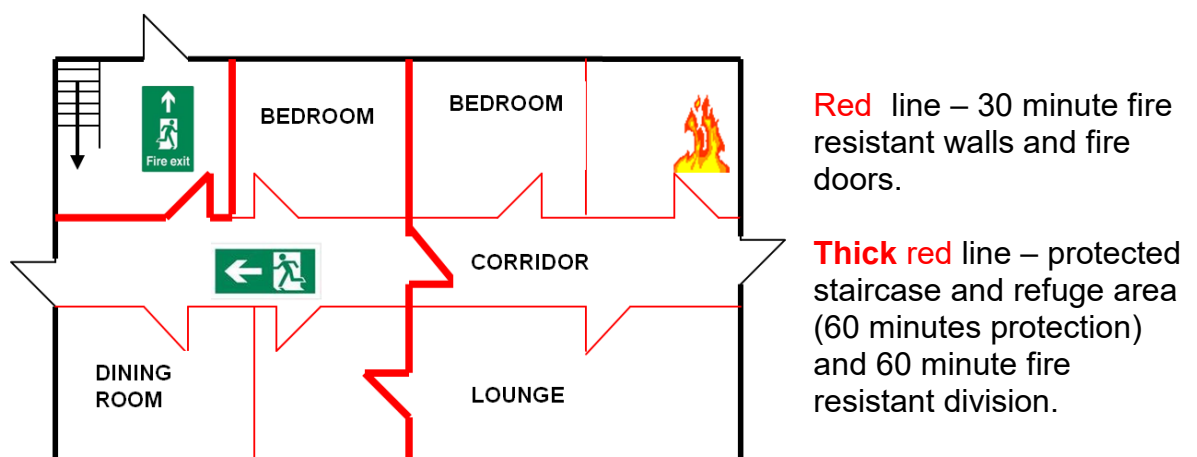
or remain in situ is that of the person in charge and the decision will ultimately depend on the location of the incident and whether it is deemed to be a threat to adjoining areas.

### 5.3 The Main Stages of Evacuation - Progressive horizontal evacuation

5.3.1 The principle of progressive horizontal evacuation is that of moving occupants from an area affected by fire through a fire resisting barrier to an adjoining safe area on the same floor. This is designed to protect the occupants from immediate danger without the need to leave the building. These protected areas can be anywhere provided they are protected by fire resistant materials and fire doors and have means of escape if needed.

5.3.2 Virtually all buildings today are constructed of internal fire resistance on the walls and ceilings and protected compartments are created by the inclusion of fire doors which normally afford either 30 minute or 60 minute fire resistance. This effectively divides the floor or building into areas protected from fire. Fire doors are normally provided with smoke seals around the edge of the door or the door rebate. This is to prevent the passage of smoke from one area to another and hence the reason for not allowing fire doors to be left wedged open.

5.3.3 In buildings with more than one floor, staircase(s) should be protected up to 60 minutes fire resistance to create safe refuges for wheelchair users and also to create a protected escape route for those persons above ground floor level. In situations involving progressive horizontal evacuation, occupants may remain in these protected areas until the fire is dealt with or it is deemed safe to return to normal activities. This procedure should give sufficient time for non-ambulant or mobility impaired persons to be evacuated to a place of safety. Below is a typical floor plan of a building with fire resistance and protected areas.



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- 5.3.4 The fire is in a room just off the corridor. Any persons in the lounge or opposite bedroom could evacuate those rooms and take refuge in the dining room. By doing this they will have put at least two fire doors between themselves and the fire compartment which should give at least 60 minutes protection.
- 5.3.5 They also have a choice of two fire exits in case a full evacuation is required, one at the end of the corridor and one in the protected staircase area.
- 5.3.6 There are three main stages of progressive horizontal evacuation that should be followed depending on the severity of the incident:
- Stage 1 – horizontal evacuation to next compartment
  - Stage 2 – horizontal evacuation to another compartment on same floor
  - Stage 3 – evacuation to a place of ultimate safety
- 5.3.7 The choice of evacuation will ultimately depend on the severity of the incident and it is down to the responsible person to decide on the action to take. If there is any doubt, a rule of thumb is to always allow at least two fire doors between the fire affected area and the refuge compartment or area. The fire service should arrive within minutes and they will decide whether it is safe to return to normal activities. Wards and other departments should always liaise with adjoining work areas for the purpose of moving persons to safety if required.

## 5.4 Full Evacuation

- 5.4.1 Full evacuation or moving to a place of ultimate safety means moving all persons to the outside of the building in the first instance and remaining there until directed otherwise. This is, historically, what was always the first requirement in the event of a fire or fire alarm actuation however due to the construction of buildings over recent years and the protection fire resistance affords, full evacuation is now seen as a last option and, if at all possible, persons should remain inside the building in a safe area unless there is no option but to evacuate.

## 5.5 Fire training and evacuation drills

- 5.5.1 All staff should receive fire safety instruction organised by the departmental head/ ward manager etc. Included in this training should be evacuation procedures.
- 5.5.2 The effectiveness of plans for dealing with an outbreak of fire should be tested, in practice, by fire drills. This should be organised by the person in charge and may be in conjunction with the fire safety advisor, however, wards

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and departments are encouraged to carry out these drills without the intervention of the fire safety advisor where possible.

- 5.5.3 It is often too late to implement an evacuation procedure in the event of a fire if staff are unaware of what they are required to do. All personnel should participate in at least one fire drill annually consisting of an evacuation or a simulated evacuation depending on the circumstances of the department. Service users need not be involved in evacuation drills but staff may be used to simulate service users.

## 5.6 Fire compartments and safe areas

- 5.6.1 All new buildings and most existing buildings that are used as a place of work provide sleeping accommodation or admit members of the public must have a certain level of fire resistance depending on the use of the building.
- 5.6.2 Normal brickwork will afford about 30 minutes fire resistance as will 12.5 mm plasterboard. Dividing internal walls will normally have at least one layer of plasterboard in their construction.
- 5.6.3 All corridors and staircases must have a good level of fire resistance as they provide the main means of escape in a building.
- 5.6.4 Smoke is the biggest threat in a fire situation as it can travel long distances often unseen. All sub-dividing corridor fire doors will have smoke seals and intumescent strips added to prevent the travel of smoke. They will only prevent smoke travel if they are in the closed position.

## 5.7 Means of escape

- 5.7.1 When devising your evacuation strategy, always ensure staff are aware of the escape routes in the building and the number and location of final exits. If your strategy is to carry out progressive horizontal evacuation, make sure that the holding area you use has an alternative means of escape in the unlikely event that you will have to fully evacuate.
- 5.7.2 Exits designated as fire exits should be kept clear at all times. Nothing should be stored in or around the door area. Test the operation of these doors on a regular basis, some doors are extremely difficult to open and some won't open at all due to being in the closed position for so long. Open and close the doors at least once a month.
- 5.7.3 Points to note:

- Make the escape routes as short as possible

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- Consider how many people are going to be using the escape route
- Consider the impact of one of the means of escape being unusable
- Always consider less able-bodied persons and take into account persons learning disabilities
- Know the layout of the building and the location of final exits

## 5.8 Planning for progressive horizontal evacuation

5.8.1 Evacuation strategies need to adequately reflect the individual needs of both the building and the persons in it.

5.8.2 The objective of progressive horizontal evacuation is to provide a place of relative safety within a short distance from which further evacuation can be made if necessary but under less pressure of time.

5.8.3 A fire in any one protected area should not prevent the occupants of any other area from reaching a final exit. The adjoining protected areas chosen to accommodate occupants should be large enough to hold all persons in the premises at the time of the incident. This includes visitors, work persons staff and service users. Always remember, the safest place to evacuate is to the outside of the building and this should always be borne in mind.

5.8.4 When the fire services arrive, they will expect an evacuation to have been carried out or at least be under way. Their job is fire fighting and rescue therefore always implement the safest option available to you when considering evacuation.

## 6 Multi-Occupied Premises

6.1 In multi-occupied premises (premises with more than one employer), it is the responsibility of the person in charge of each separate area of employment to ensure, by law, the safety of all persons in that area. If CNTW Group staff are located in a building that has other employers sharing the use of the building, then the person in charge of the CNTW Group staff must ensure the safety of all persons in their area. Responsible persons in the other areas of the building will have likewise responsibilities. If an evacuation is required, either inside or outside the building, each responsible person must account for their staff only and report to the fire service officer in charge if they attend to report any persons unaccounted for. Where no one is in overall charge of the building, it is **NOT ACCEPTABLE** for the fire service to have no contact when they arrive. They will need information, especially if persons are unaccounted for.

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## 7 Summary

- 7.1 As a responsible person, knowing the evacuation procedure is essential. If in a patient area, the knowledge of individual patient's mobility is vital and the plan you implement should reflect this. All staff should know which patients require the most attention if movement is required. Practising this is the best way of identifying any problems if an incident were to occur.
- 7.2 The information in the fire action notices and emergency fire plan should be understood by all staff and it is the individual's responsibility to ensure they are familiar with it.
- 7.3 The dependency of service users varies within the CNTW Group and their ability to move under emergency conditions will differ from one area to another. Staff should be aware of the mobility of all service users in their care and, in the event of a fire or fire alarm actuation, how to prioritise if need be.
- 7.4 The CNTW Group policy is for assistance from other areas to the affected area to be implemented once the fire alarm has sounded and this is particularly important in clinical or patient areas. However, during night-time working hours the level of assistance is often considerably less than during normal working hours due to reduced staffing levels. In these circumstances it is prudent and necessary to carry out a fire evacuation drill during night shift times as well as office hours.

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