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**Long-Term Care Facilities Across America to Protect Residents with Full Sprinkler Systems**  
***CMS to Publish Final Ruling***

Long term care facilities such as nursing homes across America will, for the first time, have to protect their residents by installing sprinkler systems throughout their buildings if they wish to continue to serve Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, under a new regulation to be issued by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Facilities will have a five-year phase-in period to be fully compliant with the new rule.

Approximately three million elderly and disabled Americans reside in the nation's 16,000 nursing homes, all of which must have comprehensive sprinkler systems in place by 2013. To date, there has never been a multiple-fatality fire in a facility with a sprinkler system that meets the requirements of today's rule.

"CMS is taking further action to protect the lives of our beneficiaries through a more comprehensive and effective approach to fire safety," said Kerry Weems, acting administrator of CMS. "In the past, certain older facilities were exempt from having an automatic sprinkler system, but we now will hold all 16,000 nursing homes in the nation to this standard."

As an interim step taken prior to publication of this rule, CMS in March 2005 began requiring all long term care facilities that did not have sprinklers to install battery-operated smoke alarms in all patient rooms and public areas. Although fatal fires in nursing homes are rare, in a July 2004 report, the Government Accountability Office estimated that automatic sprinkler systems can decrease the chance of fire-related deaths by 82 percent.

CMS has already taken many actions to increase resident safety over the past several years, including stepped-up frequency in the number of fire safety inspections performed.

The agency previously began publishing on its Nursing Home Compare Web site the number of fire safety violations, as well as information on the extent to which nursing homes had sprinkler systems, for every long term care facility in the country.

**Under previous CMS regulations, newly constructed and rehabilitated nursing homes must be equipped with sprinkler systems. But prior to adoption of today's rule, existing homes were not required to have such systems by the federal government.**

CMS follows the fire safety guidelines developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and all new sprinkler systems installed as a result of this rule will have to meet NFPA technical specifications. To be in compliance with the new rule, nursing homes must have sprinkler coverage in all areas such as resident rooms; kitchen, dining and activity areas; corridors; attics; canopies; overhangs; offices; waiting areas; closets; storage areas for trash and linen; and maintenance areas, etc.

"This is an important new rule for protecting the health and safety of persons living in long term care facilities such as nursing homes who are, by definition, some of the most vulnerable among us," Weems said. "It is widely believed by fire safety experts that automatic sprinkler systems are the single most effective fire protection step facilities can take."