

ALABAMA STATE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DIVISION OF LICENSURE AND CERTIFICATION  
ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

CHAPTER 420-5-4  
ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES

420-5-4-.12 Physical Environment.

(1) **Buildings and Grounds.**

(a) The assisted living facility including site and grounds must be constructed, arranged, and maintained to ensure the safety of the residents and building occupants.

(b) Building Classification.

1. Family assisted living facilities shall be planned to serve the types of residents to be admitted and shall comply with the *Life Safety Code* Chapter for One- and Two-Family Dwellings, and shall comply with Sections (1), (2), (3), and (4) of AAC Rule 420-5-4-.12.

2. Group assisted living facilities shall be planned to serve the residents to be admitted and shall comply with Section (1), (2), (3), and (5) of AAC Rule 420-5-4-.12.

3. Congregate assisted living facilities shall be planned to serve the residents to be admitted and shall comply with Sections (1), (2), (3), (6) of AAC Rule 420-5-4-.12.

4. Renovation within the exterior walls of an assisted living facility shall in no case be of such nature as to lower the character of the structure below the applicable building requirements for the classification of license held by the assisted living facility.

5. Dually Licensed Facility.

(i) For the purposes of meeting physical facility and building code requirements, a building housing both a regular assisted living facility and a specialty care assisted living facility shall be classified as a Group or Congregate facility in accordance with the combined licensed bed capacities of both facilities. For the purposes of meeting resident care and administrative requirements, the specialty care assisted living facility and the regular assisted living facility shall be separately considered, and each shall be classified as a Congregate facility or

a Group facility in accordance with the licensed bed capacity of each, and the determination shall not be based on their combined bed capacity. See Rule 420-5-20 for Specialty Care Assisted Living Facilities and requirements.

(ii) When a facility has a portion of a building licensed for specialty care residents, instead of the entire facility, the sleeping, bathing, dining, and activity areas shall be in a distinct and separate unit within the building, licensed for specialty care assisted living. Administrative, kitchen, and service areas may be shared between the two licensed portions.

(c) Location. All assisted living facilities established or constructed shall be located so that they are free from undue noises, smoke, dust, or foul odors. New assisted living facilities shall be located at least 1,000 feet from railroads, freight yards, or disposal plants. This distance can be reduced to 500 feet when facility is separated by a boarded fence at least six feet high. This rule shall not prevent enlargement or expansion of existing assisted living facilities.

(d) Local Restrictions. The location and construction of all assisted living facilities shall comply with local zoning, building, and fire ordinances. Evidence to this effect, signed by local fire, building, or zoning officials, may be required as a condition of licensure. If a facility is to be located in an area that does not have any zoning, building, or fire authority review, a letter stating such shall be obtained from the local county commission through official board action or from the office of the probate judge.

(e) Assisted living facilities shall be located on publicly maintained streets or roads, and connected with driveways which shall be kept passable at all times.

(f) Occupancy. No part of an assisted living facility may be rented, leased, or used for any commercial purpose not reasonably necessary for the residents of the facility or the residents of other licensed facilities on the same campus. A campus consists of the premises occupied by the licensed facility together with all parcels or property that the governing authority owns or has the legal right to occupy, and which are separated from the remainder of the campus only by a public right of way. Services provided within the facility shall be limited to serving the residents of facilities on the campus that are licensed by the Department. The Department shall approve all plans for occupancy.

(g) Basements. The basement shall be considered as a story if it meets criteria established by the codes for a story.

(h) The assisted living facility must maintain adequate furnishings, fixtures, supplies, and equipment for its services.

(i) Facilities, supplies, and equipment must be maintained in safe operating condition.

(j) There must be proper ventilation, light, and temperature controls in pharmaceutical, food preparation, and other appropriate areas.

**(2) Submission of Plans and Specifications.**

(a) New Facilities, Additions, and Alterations. Plans and specifications shall be submitted for review and approval to the Department, for any building that is intended to contain an assisted living facility, and for additions and alterations to existing facilities. Submissions shall be in accordance with Alabama Administrative Code 420-5-22, "Submission of Plans and Specifications for Health Care Facilities."

**(3) Inspections.** The State Board of Health and its authorized representatives shall have access to all facilities for inspection.

**(4) Remodeling.**

(a) The remodeled area of existing facilities shall be upgraded to comply with the current requirements for new construction.

(b) Any remodeling to existing facilities shall not diminish the level of safety which existed prior to the start of the work.

**(5) General Building Requirements - Family, Group, and Congregate.**

(a) Structural Soundness and Repair. The building shall be structurally sound, free from leaks and excessive moisture, in good repair, and painted with sufficient frequency to be reasonably attractive inside and out. The interior and exterior of the building shall be kept clean and orderly.

(b) Temperature to be Maintained. The facility shall maintain a comfortable temperature. A comfortable range is between 71-81 degrees Fahrenheit.

(c) Lighting. Each resident's room shall have artificial light adequate for reading and other uses as needed. All entrances, hallways, stairways, inclines, ramps, cellars, attics,

storerooms, kitchens, laundries, and service units shall have sufficient artificial lighting to prevent accidents and promote efficiency of service. Night lights shall be provided in all hallways, stairways, and bathrooms.

(d) Screens. All screen doors and operable windows shall be equipped with tight-fitting, full-length insect screens. Screen doors shall be equipped with self closing devices.

(e) Emergency Lighting.

1. All assisted living facilities shall provide emergency artificial lighting to adequately illuminate halls, corridors, kitchens, dining areas, and stairwells in case of electrical power failure. As a minimum, dry cell battery-operated lighting shall be provided to light such spaces.

2. Emergency lighting must provide illumination in accordance with the currently adopted Life Safety Code for at least 90 minutes.

(f) Floors.

1. All floors shall be level, smooth and free of cracks, and finished so as to be easily kept clean. The basic requirement for floor finishes shall be wall-to-wall with such finishes as paint, stain, sealer, carpet, sheet vinyl, vinyl tile, hard tile, or other appropriate floor finish.

2. Any differences in floor levels shall not prevent a resident from navigating safely throughout the facility.

(g) Walls and Ceilings. All walls and ceilings shall be of sound construction with an acceptable surface and shall be kept clean and in good repair.

(h) Windows. Operable windows shall be so constructed and maintained so that they fit snugly, and are capable of being opened and closed easily.

(i) Ceiling Height. Each room occupied by residents shall have a ceiling height of eight feet or more. Existing facilities with ceiling heights less than eight feet shall be acceptable when the height complies with the codes.

(j) Handrails. If handrails are installed in halls or corridors, the handrails shall be mounted at 30-36 inches above the floor and returned to the wall at each end.

(k) Stairways. Stairways shall be well lighted, kept in good repair, and have handrails. Open space under stairs shall not

be used for storage purpose. All walls and doors under stairs shall meet the same fire rating as the stairwell.

(l) Doors.

1. In each new assisted living facility, doors of resident bathrooms connected to resident bedrooms shall swing into the bedroom.

2. Bedroom and bathroom doors may be equipped with hardware that will permit a resident to lock himself within the room, provided a master key is readily accessible for the staff at a central location.

3. Resident bedroom and other exit access doors in each assisted living facility shall be at least three feet wide.

Bedroom doors in Family assisted living facilities shall not be less than 32 inches wide.

4. Exterior egress doors except the main entry/exit door, may be equipped with a delayed egress locking system installed in accordance with NFPA 101. Other special locking arrangements are permitted only in specialty care assisted living facilities.

5. Exit doors swinging outward shall swing out over a landing having a minimum length and width equal to the door's width at the same level as the floor level, except existing doors shall not have more than a four inch step down. Exit doors of Family facilities may swing inward.

(m) Ventilation. The building shall be well-ventilated at all times to prevent accumulation of objectionable odors. Kitchens, laundries, service rooms, toilets, and bathrooms shall be ventilated by windows, gravity vents, or mechanical means as necessary to prevent offensive odors from entering other parts of the facility.

(n) Fire Extinguishers. Fire extinguishers shall be provided for each hall, kitchen, and laundry, of type and capacity appropriate to the need.

1. Each fire extinguisher shall receive an annual inspection with maintenance, and recharging when necessary, by a fire equipment servicing representative. An annual servicing tag shall be attached to the extinguisher reflecting the name of the servicing company, representative, day, month, and year of maintenance.

2. A visual inspection of each fire extinguisher shall be conducted monthly by designated staff of the facility and documented on the attached extinguisher tag by the designated staff person.

(o) Call System. Except in Family facilities, a central electric or electronic call system shall be conveniently provided for each resident, usable in bedrooms and bathrooms. The call system shall be certified to meet the applicable Underwriters Laboratories standard.

(p) Manufactured homes/mobile homes are not permitted.

(q) Fireplaces and inserts, shall be inspected and cleaned annually, and shall comply with the currently adopted building code. Openings shall be protected with screens, or doors.

(r) Exit marking. In Group and Congregate facilities, a sign bearing the word "EXIT" in plain legible block letters shall be placed at each exit. Additional signs shall be placed in corridors and passageways wherever necessary to indicate the direction of exit. Letters of signs shall be at least four inches high. All exit and directional signs shall be kept clearly legible by continuous internal electric illumination and have battery back-up or emergency power.

(s) Heating, Lighting, and other Service Equipment.

1. Central or individual room gas heating systems shall be of the enclosed flame type equipped with automatic flame shut-off control and shall be vented directly to the outside. Heating units of any type shall be located to avoid direct contact with any combustible material and shall be maintained in accordance with manufacturer's recommendation.

2. Open flame and portable heaters are prohibited in assisted living facilities. This does not apply to a fire place with gas logs protected as noted elsewhere in these rules.

3. Lighting shall be restricted to electricity. Electric wiring, motors, and other electrical equipment in all assisted living facilities shall be in accordance with local electrical codes and the NFPA National Electrical Code.

**(6) Building Requirements-Family Assisted Living Facility.**

(a) General. Family assisted living facilities shall comply with the provisions of this section. Such facilities shall be renovated to comply with the provisions of the National Fire

Protection Association, Life Safety Code Chapter for One-and Two-Family Dwellings, and other minimum standards of safety established by the Board.

(b) Fire Protection.

1. Fire Extinguishers. A five-pound BC fire extinguisher shall be provided in the kitchen. A five-pound ABC fire extinguisher shall be provided in the laundry and hall(s).

2. Smoke Detectors. Smoke detectors tied into electrical systems are required in all bedrooms, activity rooms, and hallways. Detectors shall be tested monthly for local alarm activation and documented. Defective detectors shall be replaced within 24 hours.

(c) Mechanical and electrical systems shall be inspected by local building, electrical, plumbing officials, or the State Fire Marshal, or such other person(s) as the State Board of Health may request, and their recommendations relating to adequacy and safety presented to the Board.

**(7) Building Requirements - Group Assisted Living Facilities.**

(a) General. Group assisted living facilities licensed, constructed, or renovated after December 25, 1991, shall be limited to one story buildings and shall comply with the currently adopted building code and National Fire Protection Association, Life Safety Code. Facilities, or portions of facilities, built under the currently adopted codes shall comply with the Life Safety Code Chapter for New Residential Board and Care Occupancies (excluding NFPA 101A Alternative Approaches to Life Safety). Facilities, or portions of facilities, built under previous adopted editions of the codes shall comply with the currently adopted Life Safety Code Chapter for Existing Residential Board and Care Occupancies, Impractical Evacuation Capability (excluding NFPA 101A Alternative Approaches to Life Safety).

(b) Required Fire Exits.

1. At least two exits, remote from each other and so located that there will be no dead-end corridors in excess of 20 feet, shall be provided.

2. Exits shall be so located that the distance of travel from the corridor door of any occupied room to an exit shall not exceed 100 feet.

3. Each bedroom or suite shall have at least one doorway opening directly to the outside, or to an exit corridor leading directly to the outside.

4. Exit doors shall swing to the exterior.

5. Panic hardware shall be installed on all exit doors of facilities submitted for plan review. As a minimum, single action hardware is required on all exit doors of existing facilities.

(c) Corridors and Passageways. Corridors and passageways used as a means of exit, or part of a means of exit, shall be at least 36 inches wide, shall be unobstructed, and shall not lead through any room or space used for a purpose that may obstruct free passage.

(d) Smoke Barrier Separations.

1. Buildings exceeding 3,000 square feet in area shall be divided into separate areas by smoke barriers so located as to provide ample space on each side for approximately one-half the beds. Smoke barriers shall have a fire-resistive rating of not less than one hour or minimum one-half hour for existing sprinkled facilities.

2. Doors provided in smoke barriers shall be smoke-resistive, so installed that they may normally be kept in the open position, but will close automatically upon fire alarm activation.

3. Duct penetrations in smoke barriers shall be properly protected with smoke dampers.

4. Penetrations of smoke barriers with wiring, conduits, pipes, etc., shall be sealed to maintain the fire and smoke rating.

**(8) Building Requirements - Congregate Assisted Living Facility.**

(a) General. Congregate assisted living facilities licensed, constructed, or renovated under the currently adopted codes shall comply with the building code and the requirements for limited care facilities in the "New Health Care Occupancies" Chapter of the *Life Safety Code* (excluding *NFPA 101A, Alternative Approaches to Life Safety*). Facilities, or portions of facilities, built under previously adopted editions of the codes shall comply with the currently adopted *Life Safety Code* Chapter for Existing Residential Board and Care Occupancies, Impractical Evacuation Capability, thereby requiring compliance with the requirements for limited care facilities in the "Existing Health Care Occupancies" Chapter for the *Life Safety Code* (excluding *NFPA 101A Alternative Approaches to Life Safety*).

(b) Exit doors. Panic hardware shall be installed on all exit doors.

(c) Corridors and Passageways. Corridors and passageways shall be unobstructed and shall not lead through any room or space used for a purpose that may obstruct free passage.

(d) In new construction, the temperature of hot water accessible to residents shall be automatically regulated by tempering valves and a circulating pump system, unless the water heater is dedicated to resident use.

(e) Utility rooms shall be provided for each floor of Congregate assisted living facilities. The following equipment shall be provided:

1. Paper towel holder with an adequate supply of paper towels.
2. Wall cabinet or shelves.
3. Table or counter.
4. Soap dispenser with soap.
5. Sink - counter top, wall or floor mounted.
6. Space and facilities for cleaning equipment and supplies.

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**Ed. Note:** Previous Chapter 420-5-4 "Domiciliary Care Facilities" filed September 1, 1982. **Repealed:** Filed November 20, 1991.