

# LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

*Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice*

## **CONSUMER FACTSHEET: SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

Ensuring that the nursing home is a safe environment for residents is fundamentally important. Residents typically go to a facility when they can no longer live safely at home or when they need significant care or monitoring. The high prevalence of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia among nursing home residents makes assurance of a safe environment particularly important. Nevertheless, failure to ensure a safe environment is a persistent problem.

The new federal nursing home standards include provisions to ensure resident safety as well as the ability of residents to live comfortably, in an environment that is as home-like as possible. This fact sheet provides some of the important elements of these regulations that you can use to support resident-centered advocacy for both safety and a good quality of life.

Please note: (1) Text in italics is directly from the federal regulations. (2) Numbers in brackets refer to the federal regulations (42 CFR 483.xx) and F-tag (designation used by surveyors when a facility is cited). (3) These standards are applicable to all residents in licensed nursing homes in the United States, whether they are short-term or long-term, private pay, Medicaid, Medicare or have another type of insurance. (4) Where the resident lacks capacity to make decisions and/or has assigned decision-making to someone else, that person takes the place of the resident in exercising these rights.

### **The Standards**

#### **I. Safe Environment [42 CFR 483.10(i) F-584]**

*The resident has a right to a safe, clean, comfortable and homelike environment, including but not limited to receiving treatment and supports for daily living safely.*

The facility must provide--

- A safe, clean, comfortable, and homelike environment, allowing the resident to use his or her personal belongings to the extent possible.
- This includes ensuring that the resident can receive care and services safely and that the physical layout of the facility maximizes resident independence and does not pose a safety risk.
- The facility shall exercise reasonable care for the protection of the resident's property from loss or theft.
- Housekeeping and maintenance services necessary to maintain a sanitary, orderly, and comfortable interior;

- Clean bed and bath linens that are in good condition;
- Private closet space in each resident room...;
- Adequate and comfortable lighting levels in all areas;
- Comfortable and safe temperature levels...; and
- For the maintenance of comfortable sound levels.

### Considerations for Resident-Centered Advocacy

- Nursing homes have a fundamental responsibility for ensuring that the facility environment is safe. This means free from physical hazards, such as water that is too hot and staircase doors that are not closed and secured appropriately.
- Nursing homes (including staff) must take “reasonable steps” to protect resident’s personal property from loss or theft.
- Nursing homes have long been required to ensure that the environment and conditions in the facility are as homelike and resident-centered as possible. The regulations now clarify many of these environmental expectations and requirements, including:
  - **Homelike** is defined as a nursing home that de-emphasizes the institutional character of the setting, to the extent possible, and allows the resident to use those personal belongings that support a homelike environment. *A determination of “homelike” should include the resident’s opinion of the living environment.*
  - **Lighting** – minimizes glare and provides maximum resident control, where feasible, over the intensity, location, and direction of lighting to meet their needs or enhance independent functioning.
  - **Temperature** – should be in a relatively narrow range that minimizes residents’ susceptibility to loss of body heat and is comfortable for the residents.
  - **Sound Levels** – must (1) not interfere with resident’s hearing, (2) enhance privacy when privacy is desired, and (3) encourage interaction when social participation is desired. Of particular concern to comfortable sound levels is the resident’s control over unwanted noise.
  - **Sanitary** – all resident care equipment and any equipment used by residents must be kept clean and properly stored.
  - **Orderly** – uncluttered physical environment that is neat and well-kept.
- These requirements apply to all areas in the facility that may be frequented by residents, including (but not limited to) the residents’ rooms, bathrooms, hallways, dining areas, lobby, outdoor patios, therapy areas and activity areas.

### RESOURCES

- [WWW.NURSINGHOME411.ORG](http://WWW.NURSINGHOME411.ORG). LTCCC’s website includes a variety of resources to support resident-centered advocacy, including all of our webinar programs and fact sheets.
- [WWW.THECONSUMERVOICE.ORG](http://WWW.THECONSUMERVOICE.ORG). The Consumer Voice has numerous materials and resources for residents, family members and LTC Ombudsmen.