

ICRA IN OLDER HOSPITAL BUILDINGS

The matrix does not change in an old building. The investigation does.

ASHE ICRA 2.0 assigns the same Class I-V from the same activity types and patient risk groups in a 1962 wing as in a 2024 tower. What age changes: whether the drawings can be trusted, what is hiding above the ceiling and in the walls, whether partitions and HVAC can hold the containment the class requires, and how often the job stops to re-assess. More than half of U.S. hospital facilities are over 50 years old (ASHE, 2024).

BEFORE YOU OPEN ANYTHING

[] Hazardous materials survey scoped to the disturbance - pipe insulation, floor tile AND mastic, plaster, roofing at tie-ins. Pre-1981 thermal insulation and surfacing = presumed asbestos (PACM) until sampled. Owner discloses known/presumed ACM in writing. Also: lead paint (pre-1978), PCB caulk (1950-1980), mold in cavities.

[] Drawings verified in the field - rated walls to the deck? smoke breaks where shown? dampers and valves where drawn? Produce a verified marked-up set for the permit.

[] Above-ceiling recon - accumulated dust, abandoned systems, unsealed penetrations, insulation condition, past water damage.

[] Systems archaeology - 'abandoned' lines that are live; test HVAC isolation dampers; confirm a real exhaust path for negative pressure.

THE FIVE SURPRISES

1. Hazardous material nobody budgeted - positive mastic, PACM in the chase. Hazard rule fires (below); abatement is its own regulated job.

2. Partitions that stop at the ceiling - one shared plenum above; dust crosses over the wall. Class IV/V barriers go to the deck for a reason.

3. Decades of unsealed penetrations - leaks in the pressure boundary and inherited firestopping deficiencies. Seal as enabling work.

4. HVAC that cannot hold the cascade - seized dampers, leaky ducts, no spare capacity. NAMs do more; monitor pressure continuously.

5. Dust reservoirs and hidden water - above-ceiling sediment from every prior era; mold in wall cavities. First opening of any old assembly is an inspection.

WHEN A SURPRISE CHANGES YOUR CLASS

Asbestos, mold, sewage, gray or black water: Low/Medium risk areas go to Class IV, High/Highest to Class V - regardless of activity type. Sequence: stop dust-generating work, keep the barrier and negative air UP, notify infection prevention + engineering, re-assess, amend the permit, then resume. Never resume on the old class.

Closeout: IP + engineering inspect before barriers come down; terminal clean incl. diffusers; negative air runs until flushed; leave disturbed above-ceiling space cleaner than found; and CORRECT THE DRAWINGS with everything the job learned - the next ICRA starts from your notes.