NFPA 101 Life Safety Code - Healthcare Survey Thresholds

THE DIRECT ANSWER

NFPA 101, the Life Safety Code, sets the rules for keeping building occupants safe from fire, smoke, and panic. For Medicare- and Medicaid-certified facilities, the edition that counts is still the 2012 edition of NFPA 101 (with Tentative Interim Amendments 12-1 through 12-4), paired with the 2012 edition of NFPA 99. Your state or local authority may enforce a newer edition alongside the federal one. Healthcare is built on defend-in-place: limit the fire, keep smoke out of corridors, move patients horizontally first.

THRESHOLDS SURVEYORS CHECK (CMS-2786R SUMMARY - CONFIRM AGAINST FULL CODE TEXT)

- Egress kept clear: continuously maintained free of all obstructions to full use in case of emergency (K211).
- Corridor width: new hospitals and nursing homes at least 8 ft clear; existing at least 4 ft, so nonambulatory patients can move on stretchers (K232).
- Exits: at least two, remote from each other, per story; each smoke compartment needs two distinct egress paths (K241).
- Dead-end corridors limited to 30 ft; new construction also limits common path of travel to 100 ft (K251).
- Door clear width: at least 32 in. existing; 41.5 in. for new doors serving patient movement (K233).
- Emergency lighting must last at least 1.5 hours (K291).
- Smoke compartments: no more than 22,500 sq ft, and no more than 200 ft travel distance to a smoke barrier door (K371). Smoke barriers: 1/2-hour fire resistance existing, 1 hour new.

SURVEY READINESS

- Confirm the codes per building: occupancy chapter, construction type, sprinkler status, editions enforced by CMS and by your state/local AHJs.
- Keep current life safety drawings: smoke compartments, barriers, hazardous areas, suites, waivers and equivalencies.
- Organize inspection/testing/maintenance records by K-tag - one tab per system, last 12 months, with evidence deficiencies were corrected.
- Run a mock survey with the CMS-2786R in hand, tag by tag, at least once a year and after major projects.

FIELD QUESTION

Which edition of NFPA 101 does CMS enforce?

The 2012 edition (with TIAs 12-1 through 12-4), adopted by regulation effective July 5, 2016, paired with the 2012 edition of NFPA 99.

Defend in place: the building protects the patients who cannot leave.

Caution: codes, editions, and targets vary by facility and authority having jurisdiction (AHJ). Figures marked as common practice are facility targets, not code requirements. Confirm against your AHJ and the current code text before acting.