NFPA 101 Life Safety Code for Healthcare Occupancies

THE DIRECT ANSWER

NFPA 101, the Life Safety Code , is the National Fire Protection Association's model code for protecting building occupants from fire, smoke, and toxic fumes. For healthcare occupancies (Chapters 18 for new, 19 for existing), it sets requirements for compartmentation, egress, fire protection systems, and interior finishes — all built around one reality: hospital patients mostly can't evacuate themselves , so the code emphasizes defending them in place rather than moving them.

WHAT IT REQUIRES OF HEALTHCARE OCCUPANCIES

- Smoke compartments: each floor divided into at least two smoke compartments so patients can be moved horizontally past a smoke barrier instead of down stairs.
- Corridor widths: 8 ft clear in new healthcare occupancies (6 ft in existing) to move beds and equipment.
- Fire protection: automatic sprinklers, fire alarm and detection, with specific provisions for healthcare.
- Egress: multiple remote exits; a single enclosed exit stair is never permitted in a healthcare occupancy.
- Interior finishes: flame-spread and smoke-developed limits appropriate to the occupancy.

WHO ENFORCES IT

- NFPA 101 is a model code — it has force when adopted. For Medicare/Medicaid-participating facilities, CMS enforces the 2012 edition (adopted 2016), and The Joint Commission surveys to it as well.

FIELD QUESTION

What is NFPA 101?

The National Fire Protection Association's Life Safety Code — the model code for protecting building occupants from fire and smoke.

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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.