Healthcare Facility Hub

Quick-Reference Field Guide • ICRA vs ILSM Comparison

Current version — Oct 31, 2026
Update history: healthcarefacilityhub.org/icra-vs-ilsm-difference/

CORE OPERATIONAL DISTINCTION

ICRA controls infection risk; ILSM controls life-safety risk. That is the whole distinction: An Infection Control Risk Assessment evaluates how construction could spread infection — dust, water, air — and sets containment precautions. Interim Life Safety Measures are temporary protections put in place when a life safety feature — egress, fire alarm, sprinklers, barriers — is impaired or out of service. An occupied hospital renovation routinely needs both running side by side.

Dimension	ICRA (Infection Control)	ILSM (Life Safety)
Risk Controlled	**Infection** (dust, water, air pathways)	**Life safety** (fire, egress, detection, suppression)
Trigger	Construction or renovation activity near patients	A life safety feature impaired or out of service
Signature Controls	Containment barriers, negative air, HEPA filtration, cleaning, water controls	Fire watch patrols, temporary alarms, egress management, increased inspections
Ends When	Work completes and the area is cleaned and returned to service	The impaired life safety feature is restored and verified

ICRA Scope & Outputs

INFECTION PREV.

Core Question: What will this work release, who is exposed, and what class of precautions does that pairing require?

- **Containment barriers:** Dust-tight floor-to-ceiling seals
- **Negative pressure:** HEPA exhaust creating airflow into work area
- **Cleaning & housekeeping:** Sticky mats, HEPA vacuuming, damp wiping
- **Water controls:** Stagnant water prevention & barrier flushing
- **Monitoring:** Continuous differential pressure verification
- **Program Owners:** Infection Prevention, with Facilities and Project Team

ILSM Scope & Outputs

LIFE SAFETY / FAC.

Core Question: Which life safety features are impaired by this work or deficiency, and what measures compensate?

- **Fire watch:** Continuous physical patrols when alarm/sprinkler down
- **Temporary detection:** Temporary smoke/heat devices wired to panel
- **Egress management:** Unobstructed exit pathways, lit temporary signage
- **Staff notification & training:** Contractor hot work drills, staff alert
- **Increased inspections:** Daily waste, fire doors, extinguisher checks
- **Program Owners:** Life Safety / Facilities function under Fire Safety Plan

THE INDEPENDENT CLOSE-OUT RULE

One close-out never closes the other. The two programs run in parallel, are documented in parallel, and close out on their own independent criteria: finishing the ICRA close-out (cleaning, barrier removal) does *not* close the ILSM record, and restoring the sprinkler or alarm does *not* end containment.

Current version — Oct 31, 2026
Update history: healthcarefacilityhub.org/icra-vs-ilsm-difference/

WHEN A PROJECT NEEDS ONE, THE OTHER, OR BOTH

1. ICRA ONLY — Contained Interior Refresh (No System Impairment)

Criteria: Dusty renovation that touches no life safety system and blocks no egress. Example: a contained interior drywall and paint refresh on an unoccupied floor, with fire detection and sprinkler suppression fully intact and operational throughout.

2. ILSM ONLY — System Impairment or Physical Deficiency (No Construction)

Criteria: No construction activity occurring. Example: a sprinkler line freeze/break, main riser valve replacement, or a compromised smoke barrier wall under repair. *ILSM is not a construction program — construction is simply its most common trigger.*

3. BOTH — Occupied Hospital Renovation (Dual-Track Activated)

Criteria: The typical occupied healthcare project. Demolition releases airborne dust (ICRA) while a sprinkler zone is shut for branch tie-ins and a corridor segment is inside the work boundary (ILSM). Both must be active, independently managed, and independently documented.

⚠ Joint Commission Survey Seam Defense

Surveyors test the seam: The Joint Commission and CMS surveyors will ask a construction project team for its **ICRA permit** and its **ILSM assessment** in the same conversation. Findings in each cluster trace directly to a project that ran one process and forgot the other:

- **Common ICRA Pitfall:** ILSM fire watch posted and egress signs maintained, but dust barrier penetrations unsealed and negative pressure unmonitored.
- **Common ILSM Pitfall:** Flawless anteroom and HEPA exhaust running, but sprinkler zone shut down with no documented fire watch patrol logs or AHJ notification.
- **Close-Out Seam Error:** Tearing down dust barriers because painting finished, while temporary exit routing remains active without Life Safety sign-off.

QUICK FIELD AUDIT CHECKLIST

- [ ] **ICRA Permit Active:** Signed by Infection Preventionist; negative pressure verified.
- [ ] **ILSM Assessment Logged:** Approved by Life Safety/Facilities; compensatory actions in effect.
- [ ] **Separate Document Binders:** Maintained on site and ready for immediate surveyor review.
- [ ] **Independent Close-Out Understood:** Separate sign-off blocks required for clinical return vs system restoration.