



GARDINER ROBERTS

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Regulatory Changes Create New Fire Safety Requirements for Retirement Homes

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On January 1, 2014, changes to the Fire Code (Reg. 150/13), which is a regulation under the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*, came into effect. These regulatory changes require retirement homes to implement various fire safety measures and perform a number of retro-fits by certain dates. As will be set out below, some of these changes take effect immediately, whereas others will take effect over the course of the next several years.

In considering these regulatory changes, it is also important to appreciate that these new requirements are in addition to the fire safety provisions set out in the *Retirement Homes Act, 2010* (the “RHA”), which are already in effect.

Fire Safety Plans

As of January 1, 2014, retirement homes are required to have a fire safety plan and maintain sufficient supervisory staff to carry out the duties set out in the plan. In addition, retirement homes must keep a record of the fire safety training provided to supervisory staff, which must be kept for a minimum of two years and be made available for examination to the Chief Fire Official upon request.

The new regulatory changes also require that retirement homes conduct an approved fire drill at least once during every 12 month period, which must take place at a time when the lowest staffing level complement are working. Retirement homes are also required to notify the Chief Fire Official regarding the results of these fire drills, within an approved time period.

Under the RHA, retirement homes are already required to post information (in the retirement home) explaining the measures that are to be taken in the event of a fire. Retirement homes that have more than 10 residents must also have an emergency plan that deals with fires and complies with all prescribed safety standards regarding fire and emergency evacuation plans. Furthermore, under the RHA, all staff working in retirement homes are to be provided with training in fire prevention and safety.

Smoke Alarms and Signals

Effective March 1, 2014, every suite or sleeping room in a retirement home is required to have a smoke alarm if the room or suite is not equipped with a smoke detector connected to a fire alarm system.

Beginning on January 1, 2015, unless an interconnected smoke alarm system is in place, retirement homes must ensure that fire alarm systems have a provision for notifying the fire department that a fire alarm signal or alert signal has been initiated.

Emergency Lighting

As of January 1, 2015, retirement homes must install emergency lighting in exit stairways, public corridors and other principal access to exits, which must be designed to provide illumination for at least 30 minutes. However, this rule does not apply to buildings that are 3 storeys or less and provide sleeping accommodations to 10 persons or less.

Voice Communication Systems

Beginning on January 1, 2016, a voice communication system must be installed in every retirement home that has a floor that is more than 18 metres above grade. The voice communication system must consist of loudspeakers operated from the central alarm and control facility or another approved location that is accessible to the fire department and supervisory staff. The voice communication system must also provide a clear verbal signal throughout the building, with the exception of elevator cars, and automatically silence fire alarm devices when the loudspeakers are in use. A public address system that is capable of providing a clear verbal signal through the building will be deemed to be in compliance with this voice communication system requirement.

Self-Closing Devices on Doors

By January 1, 2016, retirement homes must install self-closing devices on doors to suites and sleeping rooms not in suites, unless the doors open directly to the exterior of the building. The self-closing devices requirement will also not apply to buildings that are 3 storeys or less and provide sleeping accommodations to 10 persons or less; or to buildings that have public corridors on each floor area which are subdivided in accordance with certain specifications, as set out in section 9.7.2.1(3) of the Fire Code.

Sprinkler Systems

As of January 1, 2019, retirement homes must install an automatic sprinkler system. The type of sprinkler system required will vary from home to home and will depend on certain factors, including the height of the home, in storeys, and the number of residents. In order to ensure that the appropriate sprinkler system is installed, retirement home operators should review section 9.7.5.1 of the Fire Code.

In addition, beginning on January 1, 2015, all sprinkler systems installed in retirement homes must be able to provide notification to the fire department upon activation, unless a fire alarm or interconnected smoke alarm system provides notification to the fire department that a fire alarm or alert signal has been initiated.

At this time, retirement home operators should also be aware of the fact that the RHA already requires them to advise residents whether or not their room has automatic sprinklers.

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