

**A Survey of the FIRE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
of Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC's) in New Jersey – 2011**
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INTRODUCTION

In late 2010, The Pines at Whiting undertook to improve upon their policies, procedures and hardware in fire emergencies. Previous experience at The Pines had indicated two significant problems. The first was that, even though there was a hallway sound alarm system that met State regulations, people with hearing impairment were unable to hear the alarm—especially when hearing aids were removed upon retiring. The second problem was a result of having a three-story building. In an evacuation emergency, residents in upper floors who used walkers or wheel chairs required assistance in descending stairways. The questions—who should provide the assistance or were there other solutions to the problem? We wondered if other CCRC's had found ways to solve either or both of these problems.

It was at this point that our ORANJ Vice President, David Hibberson of Harrogate, suggested that we should conduct a survey of all the CCRC's in the State to see if answers existed to solve our problems. This suggestion resulted in the preparation of a Fire Emergency Questionnaire (copy attached) which a representative of each CCRC was requested to complete. The summary of the results of that questionnaire forms the basis for this paper. We received responses from 22 of the 24 CCRC's in the State and our interpretation of the responses on a question-by-question basis is presented below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Responses to questions are presented in the same order as they appeared in the questionnaire.

Question 1A

Not surprisingly, all 22 responding organizations DO have a Fire Emergency system in place.

Question 1B

There appears to be a variety of Fire Emergency Systems employed as shown below and distributed as follows:

- 4 responders use Simplex, a Division of Emergency Communications Systems, Boca Raton, FL;
- 4 use Edwards Systems Technology, Cheshire, CT;
- 3 use ADT Securities, a Division of Tyco International;
- 2 use Notifier, a Division of Honeywell;
- 5 use other lesser-known systems (1 each);
- 4 did not know or did not specify their systems.

We did not inquire of the merits of each system in our questionnaire.

Question 1C

The frequency of inspection of each System varies widely as shown below:

<u>Frequency of Inspection</u>	<u>No. of Responders</u>
Annually	8
Five+ years	6
Biennially	3
Quarterly	1
Not specified	4

The frequency appears to be arbitrary with no obvious correlation with the equipment being used.

Question 1D

The Emergency board is most frequently located in the main entrance lobby – 7 responses or in the main entrance as well as in the Health Center area – 8 responses. The other responses include the Security Office – 2; the main Electrical Room – 2; or was not specified by the responders -3.

Question 1E

The overwhelming number – 17 emergency boards identified the specific apartment where the fire-emergency exists; 5 identified only an area of the building. It appears that all of the more frequently used equipment systems identify the specific apartment where the emergency is occurring.

Question 2A

This was a complex question and, unfortunately, no effort was made to define who was in control in a real fire emergency. From the various responses, two Management Systems appear to be most commonly used. These were a combination of Local Management and Outside Contractors in 7 responses; and a combination of Local Fire Department, Local Management and Outside Contractors in 5 responses. Four responders indicated that only Local Management was involved, 2 indicated only Outside Contractors and 2 identified Local Fire Department, Local Management and Residents as being jointly responsible. Our conclusion is that Residents were involved to a lesser extent than anticipated since Residents and Local Management were not identified as being responsible by any responders. As a result, there was no response to Question 2B.

Question 3

The number of fire drills held and the level of evacuation that occurs varies widely from CCRC to CCRC. Sixteen of the responders do not have complete evacuations and 6 have only one during the year. On the other hand, 9 responders have one fire drill without evacuation each month, 4 have one or less than one drill per year without evacuation and the balance of responses fall somewhere between 1 and 6 drills per year. Half of responders had no partial fire drills per year, 5 reported 1, 3 reported 2 and 3 reported 4-12 per year.

Question 4

The small degree of resident involvement noted in Question 2 resulted also in limited use of Resident Fire Captains. The 4 CCRC's who have Fire Captains (Crestwood Manor, The Evergreens, The Pines at Whiting and Stonebridge) use them to provide information to residents as to the nature and location of the emergency. Only the Evergreens provided affirmative responses to Questions 4A through 4E, while the others responded affirmatively to all questions except Questions 4D. Obviously, residents are not expected to assist less able-bodied residents to descend stairways.

Questions 5A, 5B and 5C

Because of the large number of issues raised in Question 5, results from Questions 5A, 5B and 5C will be discussed separately.

Of the 22 responses, 11 have alarm systems in hallways only, 9 have alarms in both hallways and apartments, and 2 have alarms in apartments only.

Of the 11 alarm systems in hallways only, 4 responses indicated sound only systems and 7 indicated a sound/strobe light system.

Of the 9 alarm systems in both hallways and apartment, 7 indicated sound/strobe light systems in both locations.

In 2 cases, sound systems were installed in hallways but supplementary strobe lights were supplied in apartments on an as-needed basis. Unless strobe lights can be supplied at little or no extra cost, it would seem a waste of money to pay for strobe lights in hallways!!

Responses to Question 5C regarding the effectiveness of the systems in alerting hearing-impaired residents, results were mixed. In those CCRC's with sound/strobe lights systems in hallways only, 2 responders said hearing-impaired residents did not respond because they were unable to hear, 4 said residents were not alerted and 5 were not sure.

When the combined systems were installed in both hallways and apartments, 6 responders reported that hearing-impaired residents were alerted, 1 said they were not alerted and 5 were not sure.

Regardless of the system used, many responders reported that the severity of the hearing impairment and the location of the strobe lights in the apartments determined the effectiveness of the alarm system.

Question 5D

Of the 11 CCRC's who reported that residents did not respond to the alarm system, 8 used Management staff and/or Local Fire Officials to alert those who did not respond and 3 were alerted by Resident Fire Captains.

Question 5E

All 22 of the responders indicated that their fire emergency system was hard wired. One respondent said they could not, at this time, recommend a wireless system. This suggests that at least 1 CCRC had considered the use of a wireless system.

Question 5F

Fourteen respondents said that they were aware of Fire Alarm Systems that are effective in alerting hearing-impaired residents. Fourteen of these indicated the effectiveness of strobe lights. One suggested an awareness of pillow and/or bed vibrators though there was no indication of their having had first-hand experience with them.

Question 6

The question of breaching fire doors during evacuations received 4 "YES" votes, 12 "NO" votes and 5 "Qualified YES" votes, depending upon whether or not the fire had blocked a previously designated exit.

CONCLUSIONS

While each CCRC seems to have its unique characteristic in handling fire emergencies, some general conclusions regarding "best mode" can be reached from this survey.

The results are summarized below:

1. Though there appear to be many fire emergency systems, two appear to dominate the CCRC industry. These are: Simplex -- part of Emergency Communications System of Boca Raton, FL and Edwards Systems Technology of Cheshire, CT.
2. Control systems are most frequently located near the main entrance and/or the Health Center area, are mostly inspected annually, and almost all systems identify the specific apartment where the emergency exists.
3. In almost all cases, fire emergencies are managed either by a combination of local management and an outside contractor or by a combination of the local fire department, local management and an outside contractor. No effort was made to define which group was in control. In no case, were residents involved to a significant extent.
4. Complete fire drill resident evacuations are rare in the CCRC industry although most have a monthly fire drill without resident evacuation.
5. Only four organizations use resident fire captains and only one expects residents to provide assistance to other less able residents in descending stairways.
6. About half of the CCRC's have alarms in hallways only, while the other half have them in both apartments and hallways.
7. Both sound systems and strobe lights are used in alarm systems. Oddly, in most cases, sound/strobe light alarms are used in both hallways and apartments. Two CCRC's use a permanent sound system in hallways and provide a strobe light only on an as-needed basis. While the sound/strobe light combination appears to be the present state-of-the-art, it does not seem to be totally successful. Perhaps a pillow or bed vibration system should be explored in new future installations!!
8. All current emergency alarm systems are hard wired. Wireless systems are apparently not yet reliable enough to be used.
9. Most CCRC's do not permit residents to breach closed fire doors in an emergency. The single exception to this norm occurs when a fire has blocked a normal fire exit so that an alternate exit must be used.

HOME PAGE TEASER 60 WORDS

The 2010 study of Resident Board members reported on 20 CCRCs with at least one resident on the board. The study found that, broadly speaking, CCRCs with resident board member arrangements established prior to legislative mandate, the “Experienced” communities in the report, differed from those whose arrangements were established since passage of the law 54

Subsidization Practices Survey

In June of 2009 the Finance Committee conducted a survey to determine how CCRCs in the ORANJ area help residents who, through no fault of their own, no longer have the income to pay for their monthly service fees 39

RESEARCH PAGE SUMMARY – 150 WORDS

Information for this Transparency Study was gathered by a questionnaire sent to the President of each Resident Association related to ORANJ. To encourage candid answers we promised not to reveal the names of the Associations, nor of respondents selected by the Presidents. After telephone follow up calls, **22 of the 24 questionnaires were returned.** A SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES is included with this report (Appendix A). From the questionnaires, we selected the most promising responses for analysis and inclusion in the report, in order to:

1. Compare evidences of present transparency levels with respondent’s feelings about how much residents enjoy candid and open communication from boards and managements;
2. Explore possible differences in levels of transparency related to different sizes of a community’s Independent Living population (IL), as reported in ORANJ occupancy reports;
3. Analyze the different roles of boards, managements, and resident committees;
4. Suggest ways that communities can improve their transparency. 153

Summary: In June of 2009 a survey was conducted to determine how CCRCs in the ORANJ area help residents who, from no fault of their own, no longer have the income to pay for their monthly service fees. The survey form was sent to the presidents of all 24 Residents Associations/Councils. 15 responded. 4 CCRCs declined to answer questions which they viewed as involving confidential information.

All CCRCs reported having a program in place to provide financial assistance to residents who are outliving their resources. This is documented in their Resident and Care Agreement (RCA), the Annual Disclosure Statement, and/or the Residents’ Handbook. CCRC subsidization policies are communicated to the residents in the RCA, in the Disclosure Statement, and during meetings with residents. 123