LOSS CONTROL TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Preventing Sauna Fires

Background:

Sauna fires are a leading cause of fire damage in Health and Fitness clubs as well as occupancies such as hotels which provide saunas for their guests. These types of fires present both a property and liability exposure and have been on the rise in the past several years.

Leading causes of sauna fires:

- Electrical malfunction of the heating element
- Drying of towels or clothes on the heating element
- Newspapers, magazines or other reading periodicals left in the sauna area
- Defective timers or thermostats

Prevention:

Sauna fires are preventable if proper risk management techniques are utilized. These techniques include:

- Ensure that the Sauna is installed by a licensed contractor. All electrical work should be contracted to a state licensed electrician that provides the insured with a Certificate of Insurance naming them as additional insured for the construction activity.

- Ensure that Sauna has a sprinkler head installed inside the sauna area extended from the buildings automatic sprinkler protection system. A high temperature head should be utilized.

- Install proper guarding around the heating element. These guards can be constructed from several materials that will provide an increased barrier from the heating element. Contact the sauna manufacture for suggested materials. Metallic barriers are not preferred as a guest may bump against the barrier and burn themselves.

- Have a formal inspection program of the facility that includes staff walkthroughs of the locker room sauna areas every 30 minutes. The inspection should include:
  - No combustible materials left in the sauna area
  - That the sauna timer is off when not in use
  - The heater guard is operational and not blocked

- Post signage not allowing reading materials in the sauna areas nor allowing drying of clothing or towels in the sauna area

CAUTION

REDUCE THE RISK OF FIRE
Do Not Place Combustible Material On Heater at Any Time.
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☑ Inspect the sauna for deterioration or charring of wood surfaces. Replace any wood surfaces that were found to be in need. The replacement should be done by a professional contractor familiar with the sauna operation and material of construction.

☑ Have the sauna maintained and serviced as required by the Operating and Maintenance Manual (O&M). This should be performed by a licensed contractor providing a certificate of insurance to the insured.

☑ Regular cleaning of the sauna area should be conducted to prevent a build up of dust and hair in the heating element area.

☑ Before facility is closed for daily operation a final walkthrough of the locker room area should be completed to ensure that the sauna control is in the off position and that no material has been left inside the sauna.

All of these suggested items should be included in a formal Health and Fitness Risk Management program. Additional information may be located on Philadelphia Insurance Company’s Loss Control website:  www.losscontrol.com