

# Safety Action Notice

Reference **SAN(SC)21/08**Issued **29 March 2021**Review Date **29 March 2022**

## Portable Electric Units in Healthcare Premises – Fire Safety

### Summary

A recent fire involving a portable electric appliance occurred in an NHS Scotland hospital. An investigation into the root cause is underway but pending any learning from this incident IRIC would like to offer general advice regarding the possible hazards associated with the use of portable electric appliances including air conditioning units and the measures that should be taken to ensure they are used safely.

As part of the current pandemic response, additional electrical equipment may be required in existing wards or in temporary COVID-19 wards and it is imperative that safety standards are adhered to; NHSS Firecode should be referenced for additional guidance.

### Action

- Bring this notice to the attention of all appropriate managers and staff.
- **WIRING** Ensure air conditioning units (which require substantial power) are not plugged into extension leads along with other electrical appliances. Note the wiring should be able to match the amperage of the unit and faulty wiring can cause unit to catch fire.
- **MAINTENANCE** Maintain equipment regularly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and clean / change filters regularly. Dirt and dust can accumulate in the vents and coils and obstruct the air flow, creating a risk of the unit choking which can lead to a fire hazard.
- **OVERHEATING** Use air conditioning units in accordance with manufacturer operating instructions. Overheating of air conditioning units can occur due to constant use.
- **PROXIMITY OF FLAMMABLE MATERIALS** Keep the area around portable appliances clear of any combustible material and maintain a free space around them.
- **STAFF AWARENESS** Immediately switch off any electrical appliances that are displaying signs of overheating. Highlight the importance of this to staff e.g. if excessive heat emanating from unit or a smell of burning
- **MANAGEMENT OF EQUIPMENT** Follow recommendations for managing all appliances as referenced in ["Guidance on Management of Medical Devices and Equipment in Scotland's Health and Social Care Services" \(SHTN 00-04\)](#) See Reference section for additional information sources.

- **INFECTION CONTROL RISK ASSESSMENT** Conduct a clinical risk assessment on use of any portable electrical appliance in a clinical area (see [EFA/2019/001 Portable fans in health and social care facilities: risk of cross infection](#) for further information). The risk assessment should consider:
  - Use during outbreaks of infection (including COVID-19)
  - Manufacturer's information and advice on how to maintain and decontaminate the appliance for safe re-use. This should be consistent with national and local infection prevention policy and any current COVID-19 guidelines

### Deadlines for action

Actions underway: Immediately

Actions complete: 24 May 2021

## Equipment Details

All Portable Electric Units in Healthcare Premises

## Problem / background

A recent fire occurred in an NHSS hospital and the NHSS Board is in the process of carrying out a full investigation into the cause of the fire, any lessons learned will be shared with all NHSS Boards upon its conclusion. Initial investigation suggests that the fire originated in and was contained to a portable electric air conditioning unit and that the fire generated large volumes of smoke and heat, resulting in a full evacuation of the four bedded ward.

Pending the investigation IRIC would offer this general advice regarding the possible hazards associated with portable electrical appliances including air conditioning units and measures that should be taken to ensure their safe use.

This information is supplementary to NHSS 'Firecode' which should be referenced for additional guidance.

## Distribution

Device Managers, Estates and Facilities, Fire Safety Advisors, Health & Safety, Infection Control Staff, Medical Physics, Risk Management, Wards

## References

- NHSS "Firecode"  
<https://www.nss.nhs.scot/publications?keywords=fire&department=Health+Facilities+Scotland&publicationType=&updatedAfter=&updatedBefore>
- EFA/2019/001 Portable fans in health and social care facilities: risk of cross infection  
<https://www.nss.nhs.scot/publications/estates-and-facilities-alert-11-january-2019/>
- Guidance on Management of Medical Devices and Equipment in Scotland's Health and Social Care Services (SHTN 00-04)  
<https://www.nss.nhs.scot/publications/guidance-on-management-of-medical-devices-and-equipment-in-scotlands-health-and-social-care-services/>

- Maintaining Portable Equipment (HSE, HSG107)  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg107.htm>
- Maintaining portable electric equipment in low-risk environments (HSE, INDG236)  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg236.htm>

## Enquiries

Enquiries (and adverse incident reports) in Scotland should be addressed to:

### **Incident Reporting & Investigation Centre (IRIC)**

NHS National Services Scotland

Gyle Square, 1 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9EB

Tel: 0131 275 7575 Email: [nss.irc@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.irc@nhs.scot)

Report options are available on the HFS website: [How to report an Adverse Incident](#)  
Further information about reporting incidents can be found in [CEL 43 \(2009\)](#) or by contacting IRIC at the above address.

NHS National Services Scotland is the common name for the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service. [www.nhsnss.org](http://www.nhsnss.org)

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