



U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Prisons

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MEMORANDUM FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATORS
ALL INSTITUTIONS

Peter Collins

FROM: Peter Collins, Chief of Fire Protection
Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Health Services Division, Central Office

SUBJECT: Use of Privacy Curtains for Isolation and
Quarantine Areas

The following guidance is being issued to all Occupational Safety and Health Administrators in response to multiple requests to create isolation/quarantine areas using privacy curtains and/or plastic sheeting.

The requests have focused on constructing temporary enclosures with the goal of limiting the spread of disease by controlling airborne particulates. When evaluating any request for a temporary enclosure, consider the effectiveness of such enclosures along with the applicable fire and safety requirements.

Infection Control

Infection control guidance issued by the BOP does not support the construction of individual isolation areas as a supplement or replacement for social distancing, face coverings, and standard precautions. The Bureau's infection control professionals have indicated that temporary enclosures do not serve a medical or infectious disease purpose.

Fire and Safety

The Life Safety Code (NFPA 101) allows privacy curtains and plastic sheeting to be used in detention and correctional facilities with a number of restrictions.

- Temporary enclosures must comply with the requirements for new detention and correctional occupancies (NFPA 101, chapter 22).
- Material used in privacy curtains must be tested in accordance with NFPA 701 (Standard Method of Fire Tests for Flame Propagation of Textiles and Films, 2015 edition).
- Special emphasis must be placed on means of egress components (number, width, distance and arrangement) (NFPA 101, chapter 22 section 2.2, Means of Egress Requirements).
- Construction of temporary enclosures necessitates a review and possible modification of the facility fire plan.

Temporary enclosures may also impact compliance with other codes and standards.

- Without proper clearance, operation of the sprinkler and fire alarm systems may be impaired.
- Temporary structures may also affect the operation of the building heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

Recommendations

The use of temporary isolation/quarantine enclosures should be discouraged based on the guidance provided by the Bureau's infection control professionals.

If an institution determines some type of physical barriers are medically necessary, encourage the use of partial height dividers constructed of a non-combustible material such as gypsum board.

If a decision is made to use privacy curtains or plastic sheeting, review the fire test documentation and verify that the installation will not interfere with area egress or the operation of any building fire protection systems. Documentation of the fire tests, egress and fire system reviews should be maintained by the institution.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at
(202) 353-(b)(7)(C).