NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
40 NORTH PEARL STREET, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12243

CESAR A. PERALES
Commissioner

[An Administrative Directive is a written communication to local Social Services Districts providing directions to be followed in the administration of public assistance and care programs.]

ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTIVE

TRANSMITTAL NO.: *86 ADM - 12*
(Family and Children Services)

TO: Commissioners of Social Services
Executive Directors

SUBJECT: Policy on Fire Safety and Fire Prevention in Foster Homes

DATE: *April 7, 1986*

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION: Social Services Districts
Child Placement Agencies

CONTACT PERSON: Any questions concerning this release should be directed to the following Fire Safety Inspectors: Burleigh Little, Buffalo Regional Office, 716-847-3145; William Shaw, Eastern Regional Office, 518-473-1174; Robert Pisano, Metropolitan Regional Office, 212-488-3605; or Thomas Caufield, Western Regional Office, 716-238-8192. Questions concerning the process of approving or reapproving foster homes should be directed to Michelle Rafael, 1-800-342-3715, extension 4-6512.

I. PURPOSE

This administrative directive has two purposes. One is to advise authorized agencies of the criteria to be used by agency caseworkers for identifying the most common fire hazards in homes being evaluated for initial certification, licensure, or approval or for recertification, relicensure, or reapproval as a foster home.

A requirement for foster boarding home certification, 18 NYCRR Section 444.5(b)(16) specifies the following:

> "The home shall be free from fire hazards and shall be equipped with at least one smoke detector."

FILING REFERENCES

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Social Services Law and Other Legal References	Bulletin/Chapter Reference	Miscellaneous Reference
84 ADM-7		18 NYCRR 444.5(b)(16)			
83 ADM-56		443.3(i) 444.8(b)(3)			

DSS-29b (REV. 8/82)

A requirement for relative foster boarding home approval, 18 NYCRR Section 444.8(b)(3) in part states:

> "When considering the home in terms of its health and safety, the agency must be satisfied that: ... the home is free of fire hazards and is equipped with at least one smoke detector."

The other purpose of the directive is to indicate what authorized agencies are expected to do to promote understanding of the concepts and principles of fire safety and fire prevention among agency foster family care staff and foster parents.

II. BACKGROUND

To certify/recertify or license/relicense or approve/reapprove a foster home, an agency has to determine that there are no fire hazards in the home. Currently, an agency has to make such determinations without reference to any Department standard or criteria as to what constitutes a fire hazard. It has been assumed that, in general, agencies have had the capability to make a reasonably sound judgment about the presence or absence or fire hazards and have been able to readily identify the obvious fire hazards during an investigation of a home.

However, knowledge about fire and an awareness of fire hazards by agency staff should not be assumed. There is always a risk that a worker, an applicant, or a foster parent may not be aware of some of the most common fire hazards. An agency program of fire prevention consists of helping staff, applicants, and foster parents to become knowledgeable about fire safety and fire prevention and, also, to be aware of conditions that constitute fire hazards.

III. PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

A. Fire safety and fire prevention should be regarded as ongoing supervisory and educational processes aimed at making certain that foster homes are fire safe environments.

B. Agency caseworkers and foster parents need to be knowledgeable about the following conditions that constitute the most common fire hazards in a home:

1. The storage of combustible materials near a furnace or any heating unit in the home.

2. A furnace that is not working properly.

3. Smoking in bedrooms and in bed.

4. Overloaded electrical circuits; more than one appliance connected to an extension cord.

5. Grease on cooking surfaces.

6. Portable space heaters.

   NOTE: A major concern is the extremely hot surface of portable gas or kerosene heaters which are accessible to children, especially younger children. With all kerosene heaters, even if properly vented, the process of handling and storing the fuel represents a dangerous hazard due to the possibilities of spillage and leakage.

7. Fireplaces without screens and/or those which are improperly vented.

8. Chimneys that are overheated by overfiring a fireplace, causing a condition that can ignite the tar deposits and accumulated soot on the chimneys inside walls.

   NOTE: A fireplace or stove should never, <u>under any circumstances</u>, be used for burning large amounts of paper scraps, corrugated boxes, wood shavings, etc. These materials are capable of burning at such high temperatures as to make chimney damage likely. A tried and proven formula for disaster is the burning in a fireplace or stove of all the Christmas wrappings and boxes, or the dried Christmas tree when it is discarded. A solid fuel burning appliance should never be used as an incinerator.

9. Wood burning stoves that are not installed in compliance with the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code.

   NOTE: Verification of compliance may be requested by contacting the local building code department or Fire Prevention Bureau.

C. Improvement in investigative homefinding skills related to fire safety issues is an important training goal. Staff confidence in managing this aspect of their investigative assignment will be increased by opportunities to learn about fire hazards and fire safety and to know the following:

1. Electric stoves and electrical wiring were the most frequent causes of fire in a recent 12 month period for which statistics were available. They caused nearly 1.3 million fires.

2. Cigarettes, gas stoves, matches, and defective television sets were the next most frequent causes of fire, in that order.

3. There are four distinct phases of fire: (1) the Incipient Stage, when there is no visible smoke or flame; (2) the Smoldering Stage, when there is smoke but no flame; (3) the Flame Stage, when actual fire exists and heat and/or gas buildup begins, and (4) the Heat Stage, when uncontrolled high heat follows rapidly with an uncontrolled spread of superheated air.

4. While fire is in the Incipient or Smoldering stage it can exist for hours, or even days. Once the Flame and Heat stages are reached, fire can, and usually does, develop with catastrophic speed.

5. Once flames break out a person has, on the average, less than four minutes in which to escape before being overcome by toxic gases or superheated air.

6. Most fatal home fires occur between midnight and 6 a.m., when family members are asleep.

7. The second floor is the most dangerous floor in the home. Fires on the first floor or in the basement can create gasses that asphyxiate sleepers on the second floor, even if the flames don't reach that level.

8. All burning materials can give off poisonous gasses. Deadly fire-gas fumes result from the burning of wood, nylon, cotton, wool, silk, rayon, furs, paper, rubber, plastic, and leather.

9. Residents should exit immediately from their house when a fire breaks out. They should call the fire department from outside the building, and should never re-enter a burning building.

10. Smoke detectors which detect fires before they reach the Flame or Heat stages are more effective than those which react only to high temperatures.

11. Fire exit plans and practice in using two escape routes (one for normal use and one for emergency use) significantly increase an individual's chances for survival in a fire.

IV. REQUIRED ACTION

By April 1, 1986 each authorized agency shall be required:

A. To inform all certified, licensed, and approved foster parents and prospective foster parents of the fire hazards identified in this directive and to advise them that the existence of such fire hazards as well as any other fire hazard in the home is contrary to the provisions of 18 NYCRR Section 444.5(b)(16) and 18 NYCRR Section 444.8(b)(3)(iii) requiring certified, licensed, and approved homes to be free of fire hazards and equipped with at least one smoke detector.

B. To notify all certified, licensed, and approved foster parents and foster parent applicants that the use of portable space heaters in a home will preclude certification, recertification, approval, reapproval, licensure, and relicensure unless an exception to this prohibition is requested and granted by the Department following an inspection of the home by a local fire coordinator, fire department code enforcement officer or a fire safety inspector

from one of the Department's regional offices. Exceptions shall not be granted for the use of either kerosene or gas portable space heaters.

C. To use in all home study investigations of prospective foster homes a fire safety inspection form, DSS-3751. The fire safety inspection form shall be filed in the record of each foster parent. (The Department's mandated fire safety inspection form is included in the Appendix.)

D. To have the topic of fire safety and fire hazards identified in this directive included in the agency's orientation of foster parent applicants.

E. To provide fire safety training for agency staff assigned to a foster family care program, and after April 1, 1986 offer it to certified, licensed, and approved foster parents when, in the judgment of the agency, it is needed.

Note: The method for training foster parents as well as agency staff is left to the discretion of each agency. The scope of the training should, at least, include the fire safety issues and principles that are the focus of this directive and of the pamphlets that are available from the New York Department of State's Office of Fire Prevention and Control. See VI.A below.

V. Recommended Action

A. Contact the local fire department to determine if the home of a foster parent applicant has a fire history and the cause of any fire that has occurred. Discuss the possible implications of a fire history with the applicant.

B. Contact the local fire department following any fire in a foster home; discuss the information that is obtained from the department with the foster parents. The goal of the discussion is to determine whether the home can continue to be used as a placement resource.

C. Contact an official of a local fire department or a regional office fire safety inspector for consultation and technical assistance in resolving any fire safety issue that is identified during a home study investigation.

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. The Department of State's Office of Fire Prevention and Control has produced a number of fire safety education pamphlets which are available for distribution. When ordering, please limit request to the amount needed. Stockpiling these pamphlets withholds this valuable information from others. A maximum request of 2,500 pamphlets is permitted.

The following pamphlets are available:

a. Arson Safety
b. Barbecue Safety
c. Christmas Tree Safety
d. Exit Drill in the Home
e. Fireplace Safety
f. Smoke detectors
g. Wood stove safety

To order the pamphlets use the order form in Appendix B and send it to the following address:

Public Fire Prevention Education
New York Department of State
Office of Fire Prevention and Control
162 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12231

B. For technical assistance and consultation on the development of fire safety training programs agencies may call the Fire Safety Inspectors in the Department's regional offices. A comprehensive training program on fire safety that agencies may use selectively in their orientation programs for foster parent applicants and for developing a training module may be obtained from the fire safety inspectors in the regional offices.

VII. EFFECTIVE DATE

The requirements described herein for establishing compliance with Department Regulations 444.5(b)(16) and 444.8(b)(3)(iii) will be effective April 1, 1986.

Joseph Semidei
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Family & Children Services

Attachments

APPENDICES

Appendix A - The Foster Parent Checklist for Discussing Fire Safety in the Home, DSS-3751 (3/86)

Appendix B - Public Fire Prevention Education Pamphlet Order Form

Appendix B

PUBLIC FIRE PREVENTION EDUCATION PAMPHLET ORDER FORM

NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF STATE
OFFICE OF FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL
162 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12231

The Department of State's Office of Fire Prevention and Control has produced a number of fire safety education pamphlets which are available to fire departments for distribution. When ordering, please limit your request to the amount needed. Stockpiling these pamphlets withholds this valuable information from others. A maximum request of 2,500 pamphlets is permitted. We reserve the right to reduce orders if necessary. If your organization requires additional quantities, please give a brief explanation.

The following pamphlets are available:

QUANTITY	TITLE	DATE
_____	Arrest Arson	
_____	Barbecue Safety	
_____	Christmas Tree Safety	
_____	Exit Drills In The Home	
_____	Fireplace Safety	
_____	Fire Safety Hints for Hotel/Motel Occupants	
_____	Smoke Detectors	
_____	Wood Stove Safety	

PLEASE PRINT

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____
Street Address (P.O. Box not acceptable)

Post Office _____
City State Zip Code

F100664-010 (10/84)

DSS-3751 (3/86)

THE FOSTER PARENT CHECKLIST FOR DISCUSSING FIRE SAFETY IN THE HOME

Name of Applicant/Foster Parent _____

Address _____ Telephone _____

Purpose

The checklist is to be used by an agency caseworker with persons applying for foster home certification, licensure, or approval or with experienced foster parents seeking recertification, relicensure or reapproval. The checklist is given or sent to the applicant or certified, licensed, or approved foster parent at least a week in advance of a scheduled home interview. The checklist will be used for the purpose of discussing fire hazards in the home and basic fire safety and fire safety practices.

NOTE: Any "no" answer will preclude certification, licensure, approval, recertification, relicensure, and reapproval until all identified fire safety issues are addressed by whatever corrective action is deemed appropriate and necessary by the agency.

Instructions:

Foster Parent Applicant/Foster Parent: Review the checklist statements several days in advance of the scheduled interview. You will be asked to provide a yes or no answer to each applicable statement.

Agency Caseworker: Review each statement with the applicant/foster parent; indicate in the yes/no columns how the applicant answers each statement; when a yes/no answer is not applicable leave blank and, if appropriate, explain the response in the space provided for comments. A copy of the completed checklist should be given to the applicant/foster parent.

1.	All rubbish such as old papers, broken furniture and toys, boxes, old clothes and paint cans and other useless things have been cleaned out of the attic, basement, closets, garage and yard.	Yes_____	No_____
2.	The fuse box has the right sized fuse in every socket (15 amperes is the safest size for lighting circuits).	Yes_____	No_____
3.	Smokepipes and furnaces are separated from the walls and ceilings in the house; where a smokepipe passes through a wall or ceiling it is insulated.	Yes_____	No_____
4.	A screen covers the front of the fireplace whenever a fire is going.	Yes_____	No_____
5.	There is at least one smoke detector in the home.	Yes_____	No_____
6.	Frayed electric cords often start fires. The electric cords in the home are in safe condition.	Yes_____	No_____
7.	There are no extension cords under rugs or hanging over nails.	Yes_____	No_____
8.	Matches and lighters in the house are out of reach of small children.	Yes_____	No_____
9.	The children have been instructed about the danger of playing with matches and have been told that it is against the rules of the house to use matches unless they receive parental permission.	Yes_____	No_____

10. Everybody has been warned never to use flammable liquids like gasoline for cleaning clothes or kerosene for starting fires. Yes_____ No_____

11. Oily mops are hung up and oily rags are kept in a tightly closed can or thrown away after use. Yes_____ No_____

12. If someone smokes, there are plenty of ash trays in all rooms of the house. Yes_____ No_____

13. In case the home caught fire at night, everyone knows what to do to save themselves. Yes_____ No_____

14. The family has developed an exit drill plan with at least two means of escape and they have a fire drill in the home at least once a year and within a week following the placement of a child in the home. Yes_____ No_____

15. Rubbish is disposed of regularly at the house. Yes_____ No_____

16. In case of fire all adults and school age children know how to call the fire department. Yes_____ No_____

17. The family has visited or plans to visit the local fire station to help children learn about the importance of fire safety. Yes_____ No_____

18. The ashes from any stove or fireplace in the house are kept outside in covered metal barrels away from anything that might catch fire. Yes_____ No_____

19. It is standard practice in the home to keep clothes or curtains or furniture away from the stove or any heater. Yes_____ No_____

20. The fire hazard from accumulated creosote in a chimney is understood. Yes_____ No_____

21. The chimney is checked regularly for the buildup of accumulated creosote. Yes_____ No_____
    Date chimney last checked: _____

22. The oil stove or oil heater is kept level and clean and a reputable stove man carefully inspects it for defects at least once every year. Yes_____ No_____

23. Cooking surfaces are kept free of grease. Yes_____ No_____

24. The danger of portable space heaters is understood. Yes_____ No_____
    NOTE: If there is a portable space heater in the home describe the kind, when and how it is used. Also advise applicant foster parent of the State DSS policy that restricts the use of space heaters in foster homes:

    _____

    _____

25. The fireplace has a screen and is properly vented. Yes_____ No_____

26. The woodburning stove was installed in compliance with the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code. Yes_____ No_____
    (Contact local building code department or Fire Prevention Bureau to verify compliance.)

27. The foster parent applicant(s) or foster parent(s) state that the home, in their opinion, is free of fire hazards. Yes_____ No_____

_____ Date

_____ Signature of Applicant/Foster Parent

Agency Caseworker's Supplementary Comments on Statements 1-23.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions/recommendations:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pamphlets on Fire Safety given applicant/foster parent.

/_____/ Barbecue Safety

/_____/ Fireplace Safety

/_____/ Christmas Tree Safety

/_____/ Smoke detectors

/_____/ Exit Drill in the Home

/_____/ Wood stove safety

_____ Date

_____ Signature of Agency Caseworker

Name of Agency:_____ Telephone:_____