ECRI Does Not Recommend Water-Mist Fire Extinguishers for Use in the OR

Product Identifier:
Water-Mist Fire Extinguishers [Capital Equipment]

Manufacturer: Amerex Corp, PO Box 81, 7595 Gadsden Hwy, Trussville AL 35173-0081

Background: On February 23, 2006, Amerex, a manufacturer of fire extinguishers, issued an online press release titled “Amerex Exclusive Water Mist Fire Extinguisher Gaining Popularity At Health Care Facilities” (available at http://www.prweb.com/releases/2006/2/prweb350021.htm), which states that ECRI advocates the use of water-mist fire extinguishers in the operating room (OR). In fact, this contradicts our recommendations regarding fire extinguishers that are appropriate for use in the OR. Amerex has been notified of the error and has agreed to correct the press release. However, we are concerned that healthcare facilities that have already viewed the uncorrected press release or that view a cached version of the uncorrected press release may take the incorrect recommendations into consideration.

ECRI Institute Perspectives: In ECRI’s many published articles on fire safety, and most recently in the Talk to the Specialist article “Selecting Fire Extinguishers for the Operating Room” in the February 2006 issue of ECRI’s Health Devices journal, we have explained that water-mist fire extinguishers are not recommended for use in the OR. Instead, carbon dioxide (CO\textsubscript{2}) fire extinguishers are preferred for fighting fires in the OR. Water-mist fire extinguishers expel a fine water mist and can be used to put out Class A fires (ordinary combustible fires) and Class C fires (electrically energized fires). However, the water ejected from water-mist fire extinguishers can contaminate surgical wounds and present an electric shock hazard if it pools on and around surgical devices. Because use of CO\textsubscript{2} as an extinguishing agent does not present these hazards, it can be safely used on the various types of fires that may occur in an OR. ECRI recommends that a 5-pound CO\textsubscript{2} fire extinguisher be mounted in each OR and that a 20-pound Class ABC dry-powder fire extinguisher be mounted in the OR suite as a backup. For further information regarding fire extinguishers for use in the OR, as well as other guidance on fire safety, see the February 2006 issue of Health Devices.


Comment: While a specific product is identified in this report, it is not ECRI’s intention to implicate this particular product. We believe that this problem and/or these results may occur with similar products of other manufacturers.