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## Teaching safety first — and fast

### Phillips consultants show how to snuff out emergencies

By Joy Davia  
 Staff Writer

(August 11, 2003) — At work, Dave Hood sets himself on fire.

Actually, he sets ablaze the piece of tightly woven canvas lying on his lap. He's usually in a wheelchair or on a bed, waiting for a health care worker to extinguish the blaze.

Hood, a principal in the consulting firm Russell Phillips & Associates,



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Ray Morse, seated, coaches Valley Manor Apartments employee Nathan Bader how to use a sheet to extinguish a fire on a resident's



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teaches workers at *clothing. [Day in Photos]*

hospitals, long-term care facilities and ambulatory surgical centers what to do in case of a fire. Phillips consultants — many with firefighting backgrounds — don't just lecture clients but give them hands-on training to make sure they know how to respond in an emergency.

"What is neat about Phillips is that they don't talk but walk you through procedures," said Jim DeVoe, president and chief executive of Seniorsfirst Communities and Services, which operates Valley Manor and the Kirkhaven nursing home.

"Whether they're lighting themselves on fire, filling a room with smoke or lying on a bed and allowing staff to sheet-slide them from the bed to the floor and out of the room," he said.

"That's how you learn — by doing."

Phillips consultants have other specialties, such as helping health care facilities meet regulatory codes or design disaster planning/emergency management procedures.

Consultants at offices here and in California work with 1,500 customers nationwide, including Yale-New Haven Hospital.

In 1976, Russell Phillips started the agency, consulting at mainly Rochester facilities. In 27 years, his customer base has spread to Syracuse, Buffalo and eventually across the country. He now employs 18 people.

Phillips has written evacuation plans for a coalition of 18 hospitals in the Rochester region. Consultants also do other disaster planning.

For example, helping hospitals prevent and treat operating room fires has emerged as another prevalent issue for the firm, Phillips said. "They're on the increase more and facilities are becoming more aware of the problem," he said.

There is a lot more electrical equipment being used in surgery than there was years ago, he said.


During head, neck and throat surgery, for example, a hot-tipped instrument could come into contact with the oxygen and combustible materials such as

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gauzes or sponges. To avoid this fire hazard, the consultants might advise the hospital to lessen the amount of oxygen used during surgery, among other changes, he said.

About 100 such fires a year are reported nationwide, although the number is probably undercounted, Phillips said. On average, 15 of the fires injure the patient and five involve a fatality.

Fires in a health care facility require a different way of thinking, Hood said, especially when occupants are bound to their beds or wheelchairs. It can be dangerous to try to remove everyone from the facility when all you might have to do is close the door to the room with the fire and do the same for the rooms where the residents are.

This prevents the fire from spreading and endangering residents or patients, he added.

Recently, Phillips consultants helped Kirkhaven staff undergo a mock drill where a resident disappears. An employee pretended to hide in the building, settling in a comfortable chair in the staff library, "just like a confused wandering resident with dementia might," DeVoe said.

After the 10-minute search found the mock patient, the consultants critiqued the performance of the Kirkhaven workers.

"They're not only well-versed and trained consultants, but if there's been a fire anywhere in the country - a nursing home or anyplace with seniors - they've been there," DeVoe said.

"They bring that level of actual experience. I've been here 20 years, and I'm always impressed when they talk to us about mistakes other people make in fires. It always comes back to the simple tasks we've been taught, but I see it in the staff's eyes that they really pick it up."

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