

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Those wishing to smoke at Dominican Hospital will have to go outside to do so come July 1.

Dominican ready for smoking ban

Hospital surpasses requirements with comprehensive safety plan

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SANTA CRUZ — A cigarette-ignited fire which killed an 81-year-old Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital patient a year ago Sunday has prompted a comprehensive smoking ban, which takes effect July 1.

In addition, the hospital will go above and beyond state requirements and install smoke detectors in every room.

It was about 4:30 a.m. on June 7, 1991, when Josephine "Jodie" Andrews apparently snuck a few puffs on a cigarette while lying in her hospital bed, where she was recovering from hip surgery. A wayward ash landed on the sheets where it smoldered for a while, generating a fatal layer of smoke which soon filled her lungs.

At the time, there were neither sprinklers nor smoke detectors in Andrews room — the devices were not mandated in 1967 when the part of the hospital she was

staying in was built.

In addition, Dominican's smoking policy in 1991 allowed patients to smoke in their rooms with doctors' permission and under supervision.

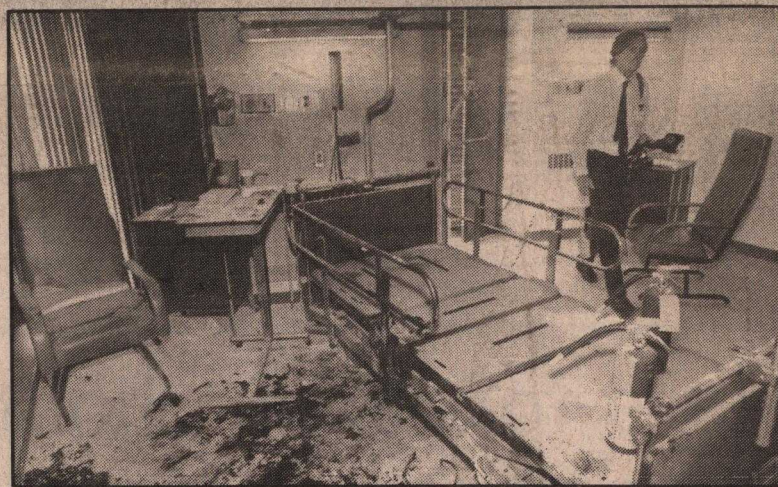
Dominican Vice President Roger Hite says Andrews' death was a shocking tragedy for hospital administrators.

"We thought we were safe because our systems were adequate and we were complying with codes," Hite said. "Something like this just traumatizes the hell out of you, and makes you say, 'Forget about the codes. What can we do to make sure this doesn't happen?'"

Fire Marshal Chuck Illidge of the Central Fire District says Dominican's response has been tremendous.

"They've made my career," he said. "I'm tickled to death because they are doing something that is not required, not in the code, and very expensive."

The hospital's board recently approved the expenditure of



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Josephine 'Jodie' Andrews died in 1991 when she was overcome by smoke from her smoldering bed.

\$250,000 to install smoke detectors in the older rooms of the hospital. New wings of the hospital, and other areas which are being remodeled, are already equipped with detectors and sprinklers.

Illidge says sprinklers would not have saved Andrews' life, because the fire was not hot enough to trigger the ceiling devices.

Last December Illidge took this message to Sacramento, where the state Building Commission was considering removing smoke detectors from hospital codes and having sprinklers provide the key protection.

"What this fire did was it proved we could have a smoky, cool fire where sprinklers would

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Smoking ban

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have been ineffective," Illidge said. "It's an ugly thing to say, but quite frankly a good thing came out of this death. It caused people to wake up a little bit and it caused wheels to spin to make sure this type of thing wouldn't happen again."

After the fire, Dominican officials formed a smoking policy task force comprised of doctors, non-smoking employees and staff members who smoke. That group put together a new policy, which prohibits smoking inside of hospital buildings and establishes a program to help employees and patients withdraw from nicotine dependence.

Hite says he is encouraged by the changes, but that he still worries about patients who may try to sneak a cigarette in their rooms, as Andrews did before she died.

Dominican's fire safety standards are comparable to other Monterey Bay hospitals, some of which instituted similar smoking bans as a result of Andrews' death. Smoke detectors are still not used in all facilities, but as renovations continue, they become more prevalent.

Andrews' half-sister, Alice Shamlian of Vallejo, has hired an attorney who recently contacted Dominican about a possible settlement. No lawsuit has been filed against the hospital. Shamlian refused to discuss her sister's death, citing concerns about the upcoming

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— *Chuck Illidge,
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ing negotiations.

Hite says the hospital is interesting hearing Shamlian's concerns.

"I think we have a certain part of responsibility for the death," Hite said. "I don't want us to be perceived as saying we're guilty, because the patient's actions were beyond our control, but the fire did happen when she was under our supervised care."