

Safety Alert 006/09

**4 November
2009**

Emergency/ Arrest Buttons

Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Clinical Operations
- Directors of Corporate Services

Action required by:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Clinical Operations
- Directors of Corporate Services

For response by:

- Directors of Clinical Governance

We recommend you also inform:

- Directors of Biomedical Engineering
- Directors of Medical Services
- Directors of Specialty Training Units
- Directors of Nursing and Midwifery
- Directors of Maintenance Services
- Medical staff
- Nurses and Midwives

Deadline for completion of action

20 November 2009

Clinical Safety, Quality and Governance Branch

NSW Department of Health
Tel. 02 9391 9200
Fax. 02 9391 9556

Email:
quality@doh.health.nsw.gov.au

Internet Website:
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs>

Intranet Website
<http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/>

Background

There have been some incidents where the manual emergency/arrest button system has failed placing patients at potential risk.

The emergency/arrest button is the primary means of calling assistance in an arrest or near arrest situation to alert staff of an emergency.

Emergency/arrest buttons are located at bedsides, chair spaces, treatment rooms, common rooms, bathrooms and toilets in clinical and outpatient areas. The location of these buttons is determined by the Australasian Health Facility Guidelines (AUS HFG).

Failure of the Emergency/Arrest Button

An investigation into an incident involving emergency/arrest buttons not functioning correctly, identified possible causes of failure which include:

- the manual red button can be seated incorrectly in the shoulder of the part and the bell will not work when pressed.
- inside the manual red button, the contacts can oxidise from not being used after a long period of time resulting in the button not working when pressed.

In addition a number of failures of duress alarms have been reported over the last three months. It would be prudent to consider a review and testing of duress alarm devices at the same time as the emergency/arrest buttons.

Mandatory actions for Area Health Services

- Hospitals should review and test the functioning of all emergency/arrest button systems as a matter of priority.
- Any defects discovered need to be remedied as soon as possible and alternate processes enacted while the system is not functioning.
- All manual and electronic emergency/arrest button devices should be tested at regular intervals in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.
- Regular audit programs should be undertaken by facilities to ensure functioning of manual and electronic emergency/arrest button devices.

Action required by Area Health Services

1. Hospitals should review and test the functioning of all emergency/arrest button systems as above.
2. AHS to provide a plan demonstrating the review and testing of all emergency/arrest buttons for hospitals in their Area by the 20 November 2009.
3. All testing of emergency/arrest buttons is to be completed by the 24 December 2009.
5. Formal advice emailed by AHS demonstrating the plan to review and testing of all emergency/arrest buttons for hospitals in their Area to quality@doh.health.nsw.gov.au by the 20 November 2009.