Don’t Fuel the Fire

HUNDREDS OF FIRES occur in U.S. operating rooms each year, caused by activating ignition sources in alcohol vapor- or oxygen-enriched environments.

The ‘fire triangle’ shows the three elements needed to start a fire (oxygen + fuel + ignition source) and who is responsible for managing them.

- Learn to recognize early signs of fire.
- Have CO₂ fire extinguishers and saline or water solution available.
- Participate in OR team fire drills.

Wait for Preps to Evaporate and O₂ to Dissipate

Properly apply alcohol-based prepping solutions and let them dry. ChloraPrep® and DuraPrep® are both nearly 75% isopropyl alcohol which is highly flammable. Wait at least three minutes for alcohol to evaporate from hairless skin and up to one hour from hair before using ignition devices. Apply drapes only after preps have dried. Don’t use too big an applicator for too small an area (see diagram). Don’t let alcohol pool in skin creases. Remove alcohol-soaked materials.

Wait for oxygen to dissipate from under drapes, and flush with room air or scavenge away before using ignition devices. Use as diluted a concentration of oxygen as possible. Stop supplemental oxygen at least one minute before using ignition devices. Inform the surgeon before increasing oxygen concentration.

* Coverage areas are approximate — don’t use too much.