Pharmacy News Article

12/18/08 - MRI Pads Exceed Critical Fire Testing Requirements, Assuring Patient Safety

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Patient Comfort Systems, Inc. announces that its MRI pads have passed and exceeded the stringent CAL TB-133 fire test standard. This independent testing is critical to assure patient safety. No other MRI pad manufacturers have publicly disclosed that their pads have passed this stringent new fire testing code.

Peter Rothschild, MD, CEO of Patient Comfort Systems, explains, "When the polyurethane foam core within the MRI pads burns, it can present more than just the obvious fire danger. These foam pads burn with great intensity releasing toxic gases into the room."

The CAL TB-133 standards were developed to provide realistic, practical testing to determine the risk of an uncontrolled fire resulting from bedding and table pad materials. These standards are strongly supported by the International Association of Fire Fighters, IAFF, and serve as the basis for uniform legislation and regulation regarding the combustible requirements of pads used in health care facilities including MRI centers. CAL TB-133 requires that the fabric, foam, fibers and/or other materials all function together as a complete unit to effectively pass this strict fire standard.

Many states throughout the country now require that pads, such as those used in MRI, meet or exceed CAL TB-133 standards. They include California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Ohio. CAL TB-133 is also considered the minimum standard for healthcare facilities in general in every other state. Therefore, the fire marshal, when inspecting an MRI suite, will often ask if the pads are CAL TB-133 certified. If they are not CAL TB-133 certified, an MRI facility runs the risk of not only failing the fire inspection, but also the legal consequences arising from a patient or employee being injured due to substandard pads.

Recently there have been numerous cases of fires occurring within MRIs. Pictures of an MRI that essentially burned to the ground can be viewed at http://www.fireinmri.smugmug.com/.

"By evaluating these pictures, it is obvious that the pads have burned and melted," said Rothschild. "These pads could possibly have caused the fire or at least contributed to it becoming uncontrollable. Clearly excessive heat and the release of carbon monoxide and other toxic gases occurred in a short period of time. Any pads used in an MRI should have completed flammability testing and meet or exceed CAL TB-133 standards. It is currently the responsibility of MRI facility managers to ask the MRI manufacturer for proof that the pads have passed CAL TB-133 testing."

Patient Comfort Systems' pads ensure maximum fire safety by using an inner lining of fire-resistant material to cover the foam core. This ensures that a fire will not reach the inner core.

"The functioning of a microwave oven is the best analogy to an MRI," continued Rothschild. "As many people have experienced, even the smallest piece of metal in a microwave oven can result in tremendous heating and possible fire if flammable materials are near. A similar situation can occur in an MRI. What is also of great concern is that the disinfectant solutions used to clean bacteria from the pads are extremely flammable thus increasing the risk of fire. If the pads have a tear, this flammable cleaning fluid can collect in the foam of the pad, which can act as a sponge. Even the smallest microscopic piece of metal could provide the spark igniting a potentially devastating fire. Therefore, it is crucial not only that the pads are CAL TB-133 certified, but they must also be completely intact, i.e. no tears or fraying, to prevent cleaning fluids from collecting and absorbing into the foam core."

Rothschild contends that fires in MRIs are under-reported for obvious reasons. No manufacturer or MRI Center wants to have their MRI labeled as a "fire hazard." However, as the pictures included in this link http://www.fireinmri.smugmug.com/ demonstrate, these magnets can burn with spectacular results.

Dr. Rothschild concluded that MRI Centers and manufacturers must take this fire risk seriously. Fires in MRI should be reported so that the public can understand these risks and strongly demand that MRI Centers and MRI manufacturers take all precautions necessary to prevent these fires.

"To the best of my knowledge, none of the pads from MRIs' manufacturers have been fire tested. This reveals the possibility that most MRI centers may not be up to current fire code standards. Fire is an ever present danger in MRIs and table pads must pass CAL TB-133 to assure patient safety."

About Peter Rothschild, MD
Dr. Peter Rothschild is considered one of the world's foremost MRI experts. He formerly served as Medical Director of the research laboratory at the University of California, San Francisco, where he helped develop the first commercially available Open MRI scanner. He is the editor of the first textbook on Open MRI, authored numerous papers on the subject and is a sought after speaker who lectures on MRI and its future. Dr. Rothschild is a Board Certified Radiologist and served as an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Radiology at the University of California at San Francisco. He earned his MD degree in 1981 from the University of Louisville, in Louisville, Kentucky. He is founder and president of Patient Comfort Systems, Inc., a company dedicated to patient comfort and safety.

In his recently released white paper published in July 2008, Dr. Rothschild called for more infectious disease control policies in the industry and patient education on how to prevent contracting a superbug infection from their MRI scan. He also provides an 11-step checklist for radiology technologists that were developed with the help of the nation's top infection control experts.

To request a copy of Dr. Rothschild's white paper, titled "Preventing Infections in MRI: Best Practices for Infection Control in and around MRI Suites," contact Doug Kohl, Sierra

Communications, (209)586-5887, or dkohl@mlode.com. More information on superbug infections in MRI can be found at www.patientcomfortsystems.com.

Photography
To view photographs of MRIs that have been involved in catastrophic fires please visit http://www.fireinmri.smugmug.com/.

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