

# Joint Commission surveyors asking 3 new questions before building tours

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Joint Commission life safety surveyors are now asking three new questions before starting building tours:

- What type of fire stopping is used in the facility?
- What is the organization's policy regarding accessing interstitial spaces and ceiling panel removal?
- Which materials are used (glutaraldehyde, ortho-phthalaldehyde (OPA), peracetic acid, etc.) for high level disinfection or sterilization?

The questions are intended to spur conversations among surveyors and health care facility managers about common areas for findings, said Jim Kendig, the Joint Commission's field director for surveyor management and development.

"They're pretty straight forward—there's no hidden agenda here," Kendig said. "We're just trying to get some information before we start the building tour."

The firestopping question is asked to learn what brand of firestopping is used, giving surveyors an idea of what to expect when they examine the facility. The question should also start a conversation about what type of training health care facility professionals have had on firestopping and barrier management, Kendig said.

The second question serves two purposes, Kendig said. First, it helps surveyors prepare for restrictions in certain high-risk areas. For example, if they know that organ transplants are conducted on a certain floor and that ceiling tile removal is prohibited there without HEPA systems, surveyors can arrange for the HEPA systems for that area in a timely manner. This also helps the Joint Commission determine the level of sophistication of the facility when it comes to infection prevention and facility management, Kendig said. For example, if a large hospital conducting bone marrow operations and organ transplants has no restrictions about interstitial spaces, that would raise red flags, Kendig said.

The third question is related to occupational safety and ventilation. If a hospital is using certain chemicals for sterilization, facility professionals should be aware of what's being used and should ensure the environment meets manufacturer recommendations. If a chemical manufacturer recommends 10 air changes per hour or ventilation directly outdoors, that needs to happen, Kendig said.

Kendig issued formal direction to surveyors in July instructing them to ask these questions before the building tour. For more information and resources on barrier management or other compliance topics, visit ASHE's Focus on Compliance project, a collaboration with the Joint Commission.