



Kentucky's Surgical Team Members Will Soon Be Protected from the Health Hazards of Surgical Smoke

Kentucky is the third state to require all licensed hospitals and freestanding ambulatory surgical facilities to adopt policies to use a smoke evacuation system for surgical procedures that generate surgical smoke.

(Denver, Colo.) March 23, 2021 – Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear has signed into law [new legislation](#) that will require licensed hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers to adopt and implement policies to prevent human exposure to surgical smoke. Surgical smoke results from thermal destruction of human tissue by heat producing devices such as lasers and electrocautery knives commonly used during surgery. The new law becomes effective January 1, 2022 and covers all planned surgical procedures likely to generate surgical smoke.

According to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), each year “an estimated 500,000 health care workers, including surgeons, nurses, anesthesiologists, and surgical technologists, are exposed to laser or electrosurgical smoke.” This smoke, also known as plume, includes carbon monoxide, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, and a variety of trace toxic gases. Prolonged exposure can lead to serious and life-threatening respiratory diseases.

The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) in collaboration with the Kentucky Nurses Association spearheaded the law’s passage. “After hearing from our nurses about the need for uniform evacuation procedures to eliminate surgical smoke in their operating rooms, lawmakers agreed to take this action to ensure smoke-free operating rooms for the state’s surgical teams,” said Jennifer Pennock, AORN senior manager of Government Affairs. “There are no specific standards for laser and electrosurgery plume hazards, instead, the safety policies have been left to the facilities and, nationwide, too few have taken action to protect their healthcare workers. We hope Kentucky’s proactive legislation will lead other states to follow suit.”

Kentucky joins Colorado and Rhode Island to enact surgical smoke-free legislation.

ABOUT AORN

Founded in 1949, AORN unites and empowers leading surgical nurses, health care organizations and industry in working together to define standardized practice in the operating room. As the world's largest professional association for perioperative nurses, the association's evidence-based guidelines, continuing education and clinical practice resources lead to optimal outcomes in patient care. AORN makes surgery safe for every patient, every time.