Elopement Is Not Just a Safety Issue.

It's a Legal Exposure.



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Introduction

When a resident wanders beyond a secured boundary, the event is rarely viewed as an isolated incident.

It could become a liability review.

Families ask:

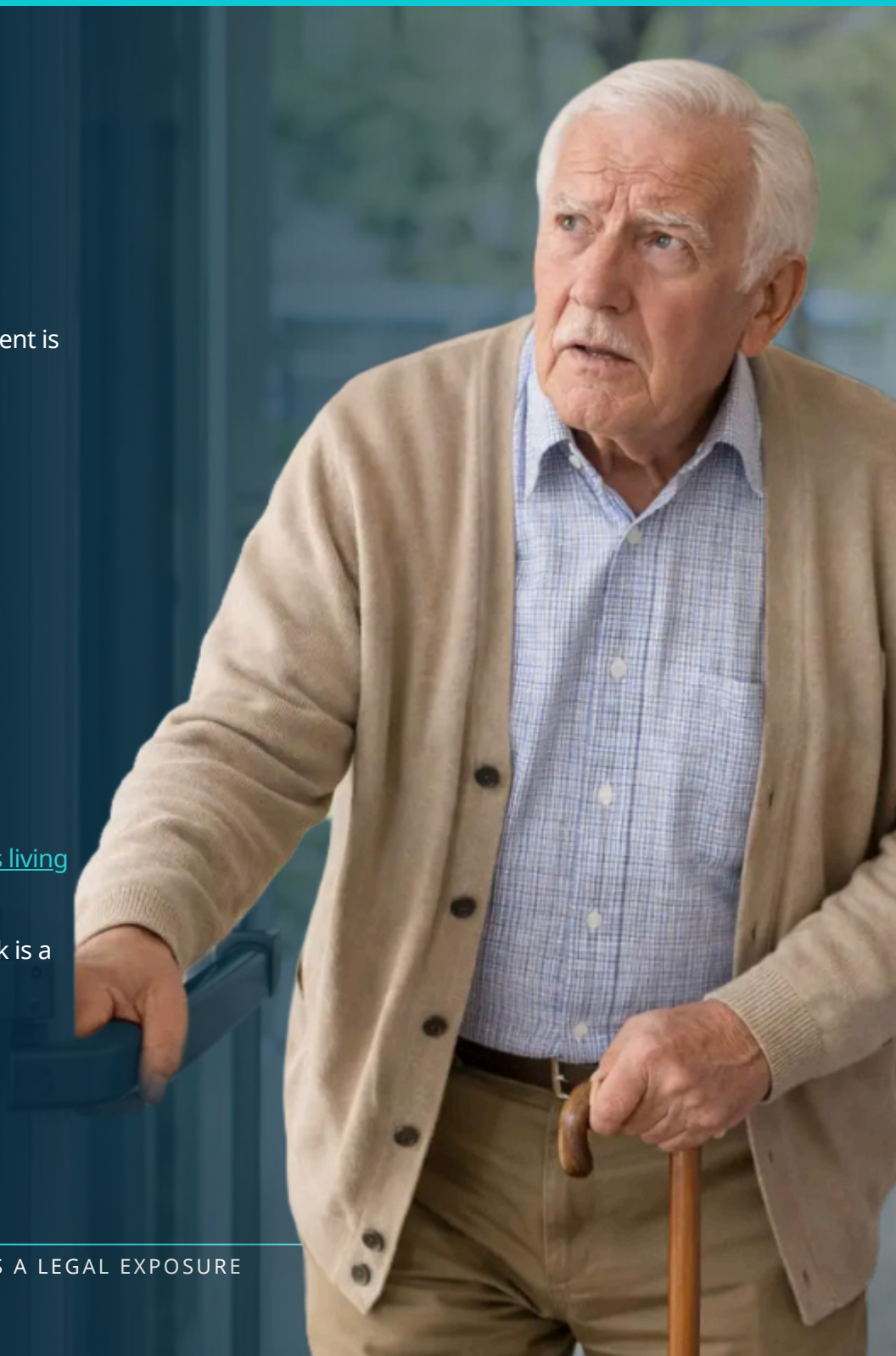
- Was monitoring appropriate?
- Were alerts fast enough?
- Did staff respond within policy?
- Is there documentation?

Regulators ask similar questions.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, six in ten individuals living with dementia will wander at some point.

For facilities serving memory care populations, elopement risk is a serious operational consideration.

And in 2026, operational risk equals legal exposure.



The Financial Impact of Wandering Incidents

Communication failures and delayed response times remain among the leading contributors to malpractice claims in healthcare. According to medical safety experts at CRICO Strategies, an analysis of 23,000 medical malpractice claims found that more than 7,000 were directly tied to communication breakdowns. Those failures resulted in $1.7 billion in malpractice costs and nearly 2,000 preventable deaths. (CRICO Strategies communication malpractice study)

The issue is not isolated to extreme cases. A study conducted by The Joint Commission found that 80% of serious medical errors involve miscommunication between caregivers during patient handovers.

For senior living teams managing complex resident needs across shifts, wings, and outdoor spaces, communication reliability is a daily safety and liability imperative.

When a wandering incident results in injury, the consequences can include:

- Litigation and settlement costs
- Regulatory scrutiny
- Increased insurance premiums
- Reputation damage
- Family distrust

Even when no injury occurs, documentation gaps can undermine defensibility.

Research also shows that coordination and communication gaps in care pathways, especially where information is fragmented across systems, contribute to inefficiencies and diminish patient safety.

In senior living settings where residents transition across spaces, staff shifts, and activity zones, these gaps directly translate into exposure to wandering and elopement risk.

The question leadership teams should be asking is not "Can we prevent every incident?"

It is "Can we demonstrate that our monitoring and response protocols met best-practice industry standards and facility policy?"

Where Facilities Remain Vulnerable



Many communities still rely on:

- Audible door alarms without mobile escalation
- Manual headcounts
- Centrally located wall panels for alerts
- Paper-based documentation
- Informal shift handoffs

These systems may have been sufficient a decade ago.

They are increasingly difficult to defend today.

Without real-time data logs showing:

- When the alert triggered
- Who received it
- How quickly it was acknowledged
- When intervention occurred

Facilities are left relying on recollection and estimations.

That is not a strong position, and it can leave you exposed during an investigation.

What Defensible Elopement Risk Management May Look Like

Modern Wander Management Systems must do more than sound an alarm at the door.

They should:

- Establish customizable safe zones
- Trigger real-time alerts before boundary breaches
- Log alert time stamps automatically
- Escalate notifications if unacknowledged
- Integrate with broader communication systems

Integrated systems create a documented chain of response.

That documentation matters.

Real-Time Communication Strengthens Defensibility

A location-based data solution powered by real-time visibility strengthens risk response and mitigation by:

- Delivering alerts directly to mobile devices
- Assigning responsibility automatically
- Escalate notifications if unacknowleged
- Recording intervention documentation

Facilities using real-time communication platforms can demonstrate measurable response performance — not just policy intent.

That distinction is critical in today's regulatory climate.

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Staff Safety Is Part of Risk Reduction

Elopement events often occur during periods of divided attention or increased workload.

Integrated Staff Duress Systems ensure:

- Immediate support for caregivers responding alone
- Faster coordinated intervention
- Real-time visibility into staff location during incidents

Protecting staff protects residents and strengthens compliance posture. It's a win-win for everyone.

Executive-Level Questions to Review This Quarter

If you oversee operations or risk management, consider evaluating:

1. Can we produce time-stamped alert and response reports within minutes?

2. Are alerts routed to individuals or simply broadcast to whoever may be listening?

3. Do we track repeated boundary approaches as early warning indicators?

4. Is escalation automated if an alert is ignored?

5. Are our systems integrated or operating independently?

Facilities unable to answer these questions confidently may be carrying unnecessary exposure. Fix it today.

Moving From Compliance to Leadership

Regulatory compliance is the baseline.

Operational leadership requires predictive insight.

Secure Care's Location-Based Data Solutions allow administrators to:

- Identify wandering patterns before escalation
- Adjust staffing based on movement analytics
- Document preventative interventions
- Reduce repeat incidents

Data-backed prevention is more defensible than reactive response.

That shift defines forward-thinking senior living organizations.

Elopement Risk Is Not Seasonal. It's Structural.

Resident mobility, cognitive decline, staffing variability, and workflow complexity are constants.

Technology should evolve accordingly.

Secure Care Products has led wander management innovation for more than four decades, beginning as the first company to design and manufacture electronic monitoring equipment for wander-prone residents. Today, our state-of the-art safety and communication platforms help facilities reduce liability exposure while strengthening resident protection in one integrated, facility-tailored solution.

If your team has not reviewed its elopement risk posture in the past twelve months, now is an appropriate time to do so.

Explore Secure Care's full portfolio of senior living safety solutions or contact our team to evaluate your current risk management framework.

Helpful Resources for Improving Resident and Staff Safety

If your facility is evaluating how to strengthen communication, monitoring, and response work flows, the following resources provide deeper insight into Secure Care's integrated safety solutions:

Discover Location-Based Staff Duress Solutions

See how real-time visibility and discreet emergency alerts protect caregivers working across large campuses and outdoor spaces.

Explore Our Wander Management Technology

Understand how customizable safe zones and real-time boundary alerts help prevent elopement incidents before they escalate.

Contact Secure Care for a Facility Safety Review

Speak with our team to evaluate how your current systems align with modern safety and monitoring standards.

About Secure Care Products

For the past 45 years, Secure Care Products, a subsidiary of Permanant Corp, has been committed to providing improved safety and locating solutions through best-in-class service and innovative design for your most valuable assets. As the first company in the world to design and manufacture electronic monitoring equipment for wander-prone residents, we empower long-term care and healthcare facilities around the world. Using state-of-the-art, cutting-edge technologies, we keep people and things protected. Let us know how we can help you by calling 1.800.451.7917 or sending us a message.

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