

AORN Releases Updated 2026 Guidelines for the Safe Use of Surgical Energy Devices

DENVER, CO, UNITED STATES, February 4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) has announced the release of its updated [2026 guidelines for the Safe Use of Surgical Energy Devices](#), introducing expanded recommendations and clearer guidance to improve [patient safety](#) and perioperative practice. Surgical energy devices are integral to modern surgery across specialties, and the revised guideline reflects the evolving nature of these technologies.

The 2026 edition includes 67 evidence-based recommendations — 12 new, 51 revised, and four unchanged — along with two new sections focused on return electrodes and quality management, helping perioperative teams apply best practices with greater ease and precision.

"The first big change is the guideline title; it's been revised to the Safe Use of Surgical Energy Devices to better reflect that broader scope of technologies used in surgery. It's not just about monopolar pencils and bipolar forceps anymore," said Renae Wright, DNP, RN, EBP-C, CNOR, Senior Perioperative Practice Specialist at AORN and lead author of the guideline.

Key Updates in the 2026 Guideline

Expanded Interdisciplinary Focus: The guideline emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to evaluating surgical energy devices, urging healthcare facilities to involve multiple stakeholders in structured reviews before selecting new technologies.

Modernized Terminology and Device Preferences: Outdated terms such as "grounding pad" are replaced with the preferred term "return electrode," aligning with current best practices. The guideline recommends dual-foil conductive or capacitive return electrodes whenever available.

Improved Management of Implanted Electronic Devices (IEDs): A significantly expanded section provides a standardized approach to managing patients with IEDs, guiding teams through preoperative to postoperative care. "Preoperative consultation with the team managing the patient's IED is essential before any procedure that involves electrosurgery or other surgical energy devices that could affect the device's function," Wright emphasized.

Fire Safety and Quality Monitoring: The updated guideline integrates AORN's [fire safety recommendations](#) and introduces a new quality section focused on event tracking, near-miss

reporting, and continuous process improvement.

Practical Takeaways for Perioperative Teams

Recommendations for return electrode placement near tattoos, jewelry, and orthopedic implants have been clarified.

Guidance for managing multiple ESUs simultaneously ensures compatibility and patient safety.

Support for active electrode monitoring in laparoscopic procedures reinforces early detection of insulation failure and stray energy.

A focus on device reprocessing, documentation, and safety checks promotes consistency and compliance with evolving standards.

The 2026 guideline empowers perioperative teams to make smarter, safer decisions in the selection and use of surgical energy devices, reinforcing AORN's commitment to advancing patient safety and clinical excellence in the operating room.

About AORN

The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) represents the interests of more than 200,000 perioperative nurses by providing evidence-based resources, continuing education, and guidance on best practices to support safe patient care in the operating room and beyond.

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