

EMERGENCY EVACUATION GUIDELINES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



- Establishing an evacuation plan
- Guidance for persons with disabilities in preparing and responding to an evacuation

CCS-EMP

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Developing a Plan for an Evacuation

Knowledge and preparation by both persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities is essential to reducing the impact of emergency disasters. When developing a plan, the safety needs of persons with disabilities should be determined on a case-by-case basis when possible, because they may vary with each individual and location. **Persons with disabilities are encouraged to take responsibility for knowing the personal emergency procedures for their location.**

- Choose 2 evacuation routes for each building.
- Set up a buddy system.
- Do not consider using elevators in an evacuation.
- Consider alternative carry and/or communication methods.
- Have a list of all your medications with you.
- Attach written instructions to all disability related equipment.
- Think about your needs for disaster supplies kits, such as disability related equipment, communication devices, service animal food, and 3 days worth of medication.
- Adopt the rule to contact building security when in campus buildings after hours.
- Have easy access to emergency contact information at all times.
- If you use a personal care attendant through an agency, check to see if the agency would provide services through another location if an evacuation were ordered.
- Participate in drills and review effectiveness of the plan, although a person with disability may not evacuate for drills or isolated and contained emergencies.

Buddy System

For a buddy system to be effective:

The person with a disability and a buddy must be able to contact each other quickly.

At least 2 buddies should be considered.

The person with a disability should train buddies.

The buddies need to be willing and capable of assisting in an evacuation.

Evacuation Options

Horizontal Evacuation: Use building exits to the outside ground level or that go into unaffected wings of multi-story complexes.

Stairway Evacuation: Use stairs to reach ground level exits.

Fire Rescue Sites: Proceed to a marked "Fire Rescue Site" with a buddy if possible. Fire Rescue Sites are normally adjacent to stairwells or elevator lobbies.

Stay in Place: (In sprinkler protected buildings only, or if an area of refuge is not available.) Unless danger is imminent, remain in a room with an exterior window, a telephone, and a solid or fire resistant door.

Assisting Persons with Disabilities in an Evacuation

When assisting a person with a disability in an emergency situation, treat the individual as you would any adult.

Either visible or hidden impairments may become disabilities under the stress and strain of an emergency. Persons with disabilities may require special consideration in an emergency because they may be dependent on mechanical aids or the help of others.

- Explain what needs to be done.
- Give the person an opportunity to define his needs and wishes to you.
- Allow him to make his own decisions as fully as possible.

Remember, at all times, when assisting a person with a disability in an emergency situation, you are expected to provide for your own safety and the safety of that person. Do not expose yourself or others to unnecessary risk by attempting to provide assistance beyond your ability.

- Assign office, class, and event locations if possible, in most accessible locations.
- Ensure egress routes and “Fire Rescue Sites” are always clear and properly marked.
- Participate in and help identify gaps in evacuation plans during practice drills.
- Respect that the person with the disability may be the best authority on how to be evacuated.
- Provide adequate notice that a potential danger exists and that evacuation should begin.

- Offer assistance but let the person explain what help is needed.
- **Carrying a person is not advisable except in the most extreme of circumstances.**
- Be aware that a service animal's sense of direction may become confused during an emergency.
- Do not abandon the person after exiting a building. Lead to a safe place with others.

The following are some suggestions that may provide additional assistance for specific disabilities:

Assisting Persons Who Use Wheelchairs

A wheelchair is part of the user's body space and should be respected. Always ask whether the wheelchair user needs assistance.

Key points to remember about wheelchairs:

1. Be aware that the wheelchair user might be able to walk with the assistance of a cane, crutches or braces.
2. Ask how the chair operates. Are the arm rests, leg rests and body supports secure? Is there a seat belt? Are the brakes working properly? The brakes are located on both sides of the chair, just above the large wheels, and can be operated by a lever. Locate the brakes before you attempt to move the chair.
3. Be sure to lock the brakes when leaving the person even for a moment. Be sure to lock the brake when transferring the person in or out of the chair.
4. Avoid narrow doorways and openings, stairs, bumpy surfaces, and wet floors. Be alert for objects in your path.
5. Always explain what you are doing.

6. Be cautious in attempting to lift a person from a wheelchair. **This should only be done in the most extreme of circumstances. Do not carry a wheelchair down or up stairs.**

7. Be familiar with designated “Fire Rescue Sites”.

- Position the person in the safest place possible according to the emergency.
- Alert emergency personnel of the person’s location.

8. Prior to moving the person, check for life support equipment.

Assisting Persons with Mobility Limitation – Non Wheelchair Users

- Do not interfere with the person’s movement.
- Clear displaced and fallen obstacles from egress routes.
- If the stairs are crowded, you may act as a buffer.

Assisting Persons with Limited Communication

- Look for an instruction card on the person.
- During an evacuation, give clear instructions.
- Maintain eye contact with the individual to insure all directions are heard and understood.
- Determine how you will best communicate with others during an emergency.

Assisting Deaf or Hard of Hearing Persons

Hearing impaired persons may be partially or profoundly deaf, and might not use hearing aids to improve their hearing. If there are aids or an implant, they may not be adequate in an emergency situation. Aids and implants amplify background noise, and may create an uncomfortable noise level during the bustle of an emergency. Use of verbal speech and speech clarity varies widely in the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

The following suggestions will help you assist a hearing impaired person in an emergency:

- Face a deaf person directly and speak slowly and naturally, even if an interpreter is present. The deaf person may be trying to speech read. Do not cover your face with your hands or other objects which you may be holding. The person may be trying to see your facial expressions. Eye contact is important also.
- Wave or tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm to attract attention.
- Flick the light to get attention in a crowded room, especially to attract the attention of a deaf person. Rapid, repeated flickering would be considered rude in an everyday situation, but is appropriate in an emergency.
- Have a pad and pencil available so that both you and the deaf person can communicate in writing if necessary.
- Do not be impatient even in an emergency situation where time is critical. The deaf person may have difficulty understanding the urgency of your message.
- Do not allow others to interrupt you, or the deaf person, during your conversation. Distractions may result in confusion.
- Use your natural gestures to communicate urgency, e.g., “come on”, “get out”, etc.
- Do not leave the deaf person alone in the dark. Having a light source is critical for communication.

Assisting Persons Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

A visually impaired person may be totally or legally blind. Someone who is legally blind may be able to differentiate between light and dark or see very large objects, but is not able to see anything clearly enough to safely depend on his vision.

The following suggestions will help you assist a blind person in an emergency:

- Speak out when approaching a visually impaired person. Let the individual know exactly where you are.
- Explain who you are, why you are there, and what needs to be done.
- Ask the person's name and use it when speaking to the person.
- Offer your help, but let the person choose what help is needed. If assisted by a seeing-eye dog, ask how to best work together.
- Ask the person what degree of vision he/she has, to help you determine how best to help or how much the person can help him/herself.
- To help compensate for lack of visual stimuli, use voice inflections.
- Let the blind person take your arm for walking. Always explain what you want to do ahead of time. The blind person may wish to walk slightly behind you in order to gauge your reactions to obstacles and curbs.
- Speak naturally, directly to the blind person, not through a third party. Do not shout.
- Remember, most blind people are quite capable and independent. Let the person tell you what they want or need.

Assisting Persons with Psychological Disabilities

- Make sure exits and safe areas are clearly marked prior to an emergency.
- Understand that the person may have difficulties in concentrating, handling stress, and initiating personal contact.

- Help reduce stress during an emergency by:
 - Offering to escort the person through the evacuation.
 - Giving clear and simple instructions.

Assisting Persons with Medical Conditions

- Medical conditions include, for example, pregnancy, respiratory or cardiac problems.
- Offer assistance walking down stairs.
- Find ways to reduce stress, exertion, and exposure to dust or smoke.
- Remind the person to bring medication or inhalers.
- Allow rest periods during an evacuation if possible.

Assisting Owners of Service Animals

- Do not pet or offer food or water without the permission of the owner.
- Plan for the service animal to be evacuated with the owner.
- In the event that you are asked to handle the service animal while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness.
- Include instructions in your for service animals.
- Some dogs fear metal grated steps. If your evacuation route has these kinds of steps, get the dog accustomed to the route.

Evacuation of Non-Ambulatory Persons

There will be instances when non-ambulatory persons will have to forsake their wheelchairs during an emergency evacuation. Those co-workers or students who assist them should work out the best method of lifting and carrying the person to prevent the risk of injury or harm. **Only in situations of extreme danger should untrained people attempt to carry another individual. Serious injury can result from carrying come non-ambulatory persons.** Two person carries are preferable, though there are several methods whereby one person can carry a non-ambulatory employee or student.

None of the techniques is suitable for all persons. With increasing weight of the person with a disability, there is an increasing difficulty, unless the person retains a moderate amount of arm strength.

The **2-Person Lifts** including a four hand seat carry where each assistant grabs one of her own wrists and the wrist of the second assistant, forming a square seat. The disabled person must be able to support himself by placing his arms around the assistant's shoulders.

In a **Two-Hand Seat** carry, an assistant on each side of the individual needing help, reaches under the immobile person's knees with one arm and under the shoulders with the other arm and locks arms with the second assistant. This carry requires less support from the disabled person.



The **Pack-Strap** technique, often preferred by health care professionals, restricts the breathing of the person being evacuated and may induce leg spasms. This method is generally not appropriate if you must descend stairs.



The **Piggy-Back** technique causes less restriction of breathing. Lifting a person for the piggy-back technique can be made easier if done at the top of a flight of stairs where the person offering assistance can use the handrail for support in lifting.



The **Cradle-Lift** may be favored by both the person assisting and the disabled person, but is very risky if they are approximately the same size and weight; the person assisting is forced to assume a posture during the lift which can result in injury to the back.



The **Firefighter's Lift** requires considerable skill on the part of the person providing the assistance to get the position where breathing is not restricted.



A research council study concludes that if it is necessary to move a person out of a wheelchair and down a flight of stairs, then the **Piggy-Back** position is preferable. If, however, the handicapped person has no arm strength, or weights less than half of the person assisting him, then the **Cradle Lift** is preferable.