

Emergency Evacuation for Persons with Disabilities

This section provides a general guideline of evacuation procedures for persons with disabilities during fire and other building emergencies. Individuals with disabilities must identify their primary and secondary evacuation routes, and seek out colleagues who are willing to serve as evacuation assistants. Other faculty and staff members can help by being aware of others who may need assistance in an evacuation.

MOBILITY-IMPAIRED - WHEELCHAIR

In most buildings, people will need to use stairwells to reach building exits. Elevators cannot be used because they have been shown to be unsafe in an emergency.

Persons in wheelchairs located on the first floor, may use building exits to the outside ground level. For disabled individuals on upper floors, it is not safe to attempt to move a wheelchair down the stairs. One effective approach to the situation is the following:

STAY IN PLACE

Working with an evacuation assistant, select a room with an exterior window, a telephone and a solid or fire-resistant door. Remain with the disabled person in this room, and send someone to the evacuation assembly area to notify emergency personnel of the location of the person needing assistance. It is also possible to place the person needing assistance near a stairway landing to await assistance, although this area may not be protected from smoke and other hazards.

Fire Department personnel, who are trained in emergency rescue, can then enter the building and assist the person in exiting the building, either down the stairs or using the emergency elevator recall.

While staying in place, the wheelchair user should keep in direct contact with emergency services by calling 911 or 322-2745 and reporting his/her location directly.

Stairway evacuation of wheelchair users should be conducted by trained professionals from emergency services. Only in situations of extreme danger

should untrained people attempt to evacuate wheelchair users. If this must be attempted, one possibility is the following.

2 PERSON CRADLE

1. Wait until other evacuees have moved down the stairwell.
2. The two helpers stand on either side of the individual.
3. They reach under the individual and lift them out in a cradle.
4. Helpers control the descent by walking slowly and cautiously.
5. NEVER leave a wheelchair in a stair well.

Or another technique is:

OFFICE CHAIR EVACUATION

1. Transfer the challenged individual to a sturdy office chair.
2. One helper gently leans the chair backwards.
3. The other helper faces the chair and holds onto the front legs of the chair. Both helpers will lift the chair simultaneously, lifting with their legs not their backs.
4. The helpers control the descent by bending their legs and keeping their back straight.

MOBILITY IMPAIRED- NON-WHEELCHAIR

Persons with mobility impairments who are able to walk independently should be able to negotiate stairs in an emergency with minor assistance. The individual should wait until the heavy traffic has cleared on the stairwell before attempting to exit. There should be at least one evacuation assistant with the challenged individual to assist if needed.

HEARING IMPAIRED

Some buildings on campus are equipped with fire strobe lights; however, some are not. Persons with hearing impairments may not hear audio alarms and will need to be alerted to emergency situations by an evacuation assistant.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Most people with visual impairments will be familiar with their immediate surroundings and frequently traveled routes. Since the emergency evacuation route may be different from the commonly traveled route, persons who are visually impaired may need assistance in evacuation. The evacuation assistant should offer his/her elbow to the individual with the visual impairment and guide him/her through the evacuation route. During the evacuation, the evacuation assistant should communicate as necessary to ensure safe evacuation.

Building emergency response staff should assess the needs of any building occupants with special needs within their zone before an emergency. Ask if there are any staff or faculty members, who require special assistance in the event of an evacuation, and arrange for nearby individuals to serve as evacuation assistants.