Survival Plans For Disabled: How To Escape From Fire

People with limited mobility / disabled need specific tips to handle disaster situations. One of these scenarios relates to addressing fire prevention within private homes, apartment buildings, and high rise buildings.

If you are disabled, you need to understand how your evacuation plans might differ from those created by someone that has other options and avenues of escape available. And be aware that panic can happen in a situation like this.

Make sure that you know how to get control of yourself and refocus your attention on what needs to be done. If you panic and do not regain control, it will cost your life.

7 Things to Consider in Your Evacuation Fire Plan

There is no such thing as a typical or model fire evacuation plan for people with disabilities. Conventional plans are worthless, as they do not take into consideration the unique circumstances of each family and each person. For example, as a matter of routine, people that are not disabled should not use elevators.

On other hand, if you are wheelchair bound or cannot crawl down steps, your fire evacuation plan should show which elevators are egress elevators. These are elevators with standby power in addition to the fire service required of all elevators, and also enable firefighters to travel to people with mobility impairments and to evacuate them to the outdoors even when a buildings normal electrical service is lost.

But remember that not every elevator is equipped with these features, and depending on the building codes where you live, there may not be an egress elevator in your building.

If you live in an apartment or high rise building your plan should also show ways to get to areas of refuge or fire rated safe havens on a building’s upper and below grade floors.

Once you reach a designated safe area, you should be able to use the phone to alert authorities and wait for emergency crews to evacuate you. These areas that you might notice in the building plans include: stair landings, elevator lobbies, or an area that is properly fire rated and provides two-way emergency communications.

Your evacuation plan should also incorporate the following:

1. Know the locations of your usable exits on the grade level of the building and know how to get to them. These exits should have wheelchair ramps to assist handicapped individuals. If these exits do not have wheelchair ramps, determine if the landings are large enough to safely accommodate a handicapped wheelchair. If not these exit landings need to be enlarged to safely hold a handicapped wheelchair and to allow for the outward swing of the exit door.
2. Once you are outside you must determine if a wheelchair user can get to a public place that is a safe distance away from the building. The public way should be identified as a safe meeting place on the fire evacuation plan.
3. If you live in a tall apartment building or other high rise building, your fire plan should show all locations for areas of refuge. In the event of a needed evacuation from an upper floor, wheelchair users should make their way to the designated area of refuge or other place of safety on the same floor.
4. Evaluate need for evacuation devices from upper and lower floors. If these devices are used they should be identified and their use should be practiced during regularly scheduled drills. The most popular evacuation device for moving a handicapped individual from a

burning building is the evacuation chair. This chair allows one or two rescuers to safely move a disabled person from a multi-story home, apartment, or a high rise building by using the stairways. Stryker evacuation Slyde provides a safe, effective way to evacuate non ambulatory patients from any multi-story building using the stairways. There is also an escape mattress that makes it possible for a bedridden person who needs assistance to move to a place of safety if there is an emergency.

5. You should practice the fire plan regularly to deal with different circumstances and unforeseen situations such as blocked paths or exits.
6. If you live in a tall apartment building or a high rise, all of the building workers including those on other shifts, should be aware that you are a wheelchair user and when you are most likely in the building.
7. Establish a relationship with the fire department or other first responders that would respond to your home in the event of a fire or other emergency. The fire department can help you:

   - Identify areas where a fire may start and develop fire avoidance procedures.
   - Develop your evacuation plan.
   - Review your emergency plan at least once a year to see if anything needs to be changed.
   - Practicing with the fire department and your evacuation plan can also help make it easier for you and those in your home to evacuate more effectively.

Fire Prevention IS at Your Hand

When you modify your home for a handicapped individual, widen the doorways from 36 inches to at least 48 inches. With larger doorways it becomes possible for two or three individuals to help get the handicapped person out of the room and eventually out of the home, apartment, or high rise building.

Always know the safest and quickest exits from any location within the home and which ones can be used based on the handicapped individual's physical capabilities. If possible, place the sleeping area as close to an accessible exit as possible so, in the event of an emergency, the handicapped person will have the quickest escape route.

Emergency exit may also require a ramp or the removal of barriers. Make the necessary adjustments to ensure a safe escape route, and make sure that the handicapped individual can also open all locks on windows and doors throughout the whole house.

Install heat or smoke detectors throughout your home, as heat and smoke detectors can reduce the chance of dying from a home fire by approximately 50 to 60%. The key locations for smoke alarms are the kitchen, basement, storage area, trash areas, accessible attics, sleeping areas, and the hallways.

Make sure that these detectors are always functioning properly, are kept clean and vacuumed regularly to remove dust particles. The one area that most people forget when they are servicing their smoke alarms is to test and change the batteries regularly: the batteries should be changed twice a year. My favorite time to do this is when daylight saving time starts and when it stops.

Smoke alarms that are hard wired to electric circuits of your home should still have a battery backup system in the event of an electrical failure. Since some fires cause circuit breakers to fail, make sure that the battery backup is working. If you are unable to perform the above tasks by yourself ask your friends, family members, or someone from the fire department to help you out.

In addition to smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors should be installed in all areas of your home, especially near fuel burning devices. Carbon monoxide is lethal at high

concentrations and can cause you to lose consciousness long before you become aware that there is a fire in a basement or other area where you may not routinely go into.

Even if you are a handicapped individual, you need to know how to use a fire extinguisher. I would recommend an A, B, C fire extinguisher because it will put out ordinary, oil, and electric fires. If you are in a wheelchair, mount a small personal extinguisher in an accessible place, learn how to operate it properly, and practice at least twice a year. A fire extinguisher can also put out fire that has caught onto your clothing if you cannot stop, drop, and roll to put out the fire.

What to Do When a Fire Occurs

Exit your home as quickly as possible. Leave all personal possessions and belongings inside, these items are not worth dying for.

Test doors before opening them: use the back of your hand and reach up high and touch the door, the doorknob, and the space between the door and the frame. If the door feels cool then open the door slowly and exit, staying as low to the ground as possible. If you can stay low to the ground, cover your mouth (it protects you from breathing in dangerous fumes and toxins), and safely exit the room as quickly as possible.

Do not use the elevators, unless they are designated as egress elevators, and do not go back inside after exiting your home. If you can, get help from your neighbors to contact the fire department.

If you get trapped in a room, close all doors between you and the fire, and fill cracks in all open spaces so no smoke enters the room. If possible, contact the fire department and tell them what room you are in. Depending upon your physical abilities, signal the emergency responders when they arrive by hanging or waving a towel out the window. This should only be

done if a window is close by, not above or near the fire, and it is safe to do so.

If you are safe in a room, or have reached a designated safe area that has been cut off by smoke and fire, it is to your advantage to wait there for the fire rescuers to come to you. If you leave this area on your own and haven’t communicated with the rescue group, there’s a good chance that you will perish in the fire. Not only have you put your own life in danger, but now the rescuers must search the home, apartment, or the high rise in order to find and remove you from danger.

If you own a cell phone keep it with you at all times. Keep it next to your bed at night, or even in the bathroom while you are taking a shower, as it gives you a constant means of communication even if you are trapped in a room and unable to reach a house phone.

MAKING YOUR HOME
WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE

Bedroom
- 4 Phone/alert system near bed
- 5 Overhang lift/manual trapeze to get in/out of bed

Exterior
- 1 Vertical platform lift for higher outdoor staircases
- 2 All-weather, outdoor stair lift
- 3 Portable ramp (front entrance)

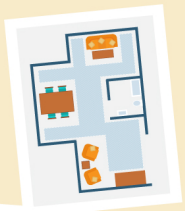
Garage
- 3 Garage entry/interior door ramp for safe, quick car access
- 11 Entry door (minimum 32" width)
- 13 Wheelchair accessible floor area for easy car loading/unloading

Bathroom
- 4 Phone/alert system near toilet & shower
- 6 Grab bars in tub & shower with 36" clearance
- 7 Bath tub lift (13"-30" bottom)
- 8 Commode lift
- 9 Grab bars next to toilet

Kitchen
- 10 Wheelchair-accessible countertop & cabinet height.
- 11 Door (minimum 32" width)
- 12 Table: 27" floor-to-table height & 30" x 48"seat spacing

Basement
- 2 A stair lift for easy basement access to washer, dryer, pantries, etc.

ACCESSIBILITY TIPS



1 Clear Pathways

Interior/exterior pathways should have accommodating widths for:

- Mobility scooters
- Power wheelchairs
- Rollators
- Standard wheelchairs

Standard Widths

36" for hallways

32" for doorways

Minimum clearance for 180 degree turns: **36"** in all directions.

2 Lighting

All rooms should be well-lit during evening, night time, and early morning

Lighting controls should be easy to access and use.

3 Security

Phones & alert systems should be installed throughout the home for quick, easy access.

A reliable security or alarm system should be installed to protect you & your home

INFOGRAPHIC CREATED BY

SmartChair By Kd Healthcare Company USA

KD SMART CHAIR

KD Smart Chair is a manufacturer of lightweight power wheelchairs. Their folding innovative designs are the future of personal mobility aid devices that helps people regain their independence.

WWW.KDSMARTCHAIR.COM

SOURCES

http://www.wilmington.va.gov/services/hisa.asp
http://www.adaptiveaccess.com/home_changes.php
http://home.howstuffworks.com/home-improvement/remodeling/how-to-make-your-home-handicap-accessible.htm
https://lifecenter.ric.org/index.php?tray=content&cid=2246
http://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf

18 Tips on Fire Prevention for Disabled People

When cooking:

- Never leave a stove unattended. If you have to leave even for a minute make sure your turn off the stove.
- When cooking, always wear tight fitting clothing so that open flames and sparks have less to land on.
- Never use oxygen near open flames or other heat sources.
- Never use water to put out a grease fire! Use a towel to smother this type of fire or use a fire extinguisher that has appropriate chemicals for putting out this type of fire.
- Always turn pot handles away from the front of the stove so they cannot be knocked over or pulled down.

When using electrical appliances and other machines:

- Unplug any appliance that begins to smell funny or produce smoke. Never use any appliance that has exposed wires. Always replace frayed or damaged electrical cords.
- Never overload extension cords with too many wires.
- Keep all extension cords out of high traffic areas.
- Electric blankets should have protection from overheating. Never over wash electric blankets because it may cause damage to the electrical circuitry.

When smoking:

- Never smoke in bed.
- Never leave smoking materials unattended.
- Always be alert when smoking cigarettes. Avoid smoking while under the influence of alcohol or prescription drugs that may make you drowsy.
- Always soak ashes in water before disposing them in the garbage can.

When using heaters or heating systems within your home:

- Always make sure there is adequate room surrounding space heaters.
- Position heaters at least three feet away from flammable materials.
- Keep a safe distance between you and a space heater.
- Have your heating systems and chimneys checked and cleaned at least once per year.
- Do not leave flammable materials such as fuel within your home. It is a good idea to keep these materials outside or in an attached garage or shed.

When you are disabled, a fire plan is both safe and workable to keep you alive. This plan will tell you what items you must purchase for safety such as the fire alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, and fire extinguishers.

Test and update the fire emergency plan for your home, apartment, or your high rise building. It is a good idea to have your local fire department go over your plan to evaluate how safe it is so you could make it alive.

*This article has been written by **Fred Tyrell** for Survivopedia.*