

Emergency Response RESCUE Program for Fire Safety

The following is a summary of fire safety considerations specifically for people with mobility impairments. It is not intended to be all-inclusive, but to get you and your caregivers thinking about your safety in the event of a fire.

How will you know there is a fire?

When you have mobility or cognitive impairment it becomes even more important to be aware of a fire as soon as possible. The sooner you know, the more time you have to react.

- Make *sure* smoke alarms are installed in your home and work area, and be sure to test them at least once a month and change the batteries twice a year. This simple technique can reduce your chances of dying in a fire by 60 percent. Detailed information about smoke alarms can be found at: www.nfpa.org.

How will you get help?

- Keep an accessible phone with you at all times, even at night. This could be a cell phone or a sip-n-puff phone next to the bed, or a picture phone.
- Consider a home fire alarm system that can provide monitoring and alert your local fire department immediately if the alarms are activated.
- Be sure that your address is easily visible from the street so that first responders can find you quickly.
- Make sure your wheelchair or mobility device is always within reach for a transfer when you are not using it, for example when you're in bed or sitting on a couch.

How will you get out?

- Make sure that your wheelchair or mobility device is always within reach for a transfer when you are not using it, for example when you're in bed or sitting on a couch.
- *Plan detailed escape plans for home and for work, and practice them!
 - Will you need to do a transfer? How many people will you need to help you?
 - Can you maneuver the escape route independently? Remember that elevators are not an option in the event of a fire. How many people will you need to help you maneuver the escape route?
 - If you'll need help with a route or a transfer, designate individuals (at work or in your home) to help you. Make sure the helpers are skilled. Practice specific transfers and/or specific ways to maneuver stairs until the helpers are very comfortable.
 - At work, identify at least twice the number of people required to provide assistance in case one or more is not available at any given time.

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- You and the other survivors are the firefighters' priority, but if it's safe they will go back in to get your mobility equipment. Make sure you can verbalize to them how to put a power chair in manual/push mode.

What if you have to wait for fire fighters?

- If at all possible, get yourself out of your wheelchair or bed onto the floor. Smoke rises, and the best air for breathing will be down low.
- If you're in a public building, even if you can't get down the stairs, locate an area of refuge. This is often inside the stairwell as these areas are often designed to resist fire longer than other rooms. Other areas may be located in an elevator lobby or other designated fire-rated safe havens. This is also a place firefighters will look for survivors first.

Plan Ahead!

- Place the RESCUE label in a visible location on the front of your home. This is the standardized placement recommended by emergency responders.
- Make sure you have TWO accessible entrances/exits in your home. If at all possible, try to have your sleeping area near an accessible exit. Consider the easiest rooms of your house to get in and out of (this may not be traditional bedroom) and consider the ground floor as a possibility to avoid navigating stairs in the event of an emergency.
- Consider installing sprinkler systems, fire-safe compartment walls, or using flame-resistant blankets and clothing to increase the time you have to be safely rescued.
- Consider placing a draw sheet on your bed so that responders may be able to grab the sheet quickly and get you to safety.
- Have your medications together at all times so that you can have someone grab them quickly if necessary.
- Visit your local fire department three days in a row. This will ensure that you meet all the personnel, regardless of which shift they work.
 - Ask them to add you into their database so that if you call with an emergency the information about your disability will be on file!
 - Give them a copy of your escape plan, and find out if they have any suggestions for your plan.
 - Offer to teach the firefighters about your wheelchair or mobility device.
- If you use a manual wheelchair, show the firefighters which parts are removable. This will help them know whether it is sturdy enough if they want to carry you in your chair.
- If you use a power wheelchair, show the firefighters how to put your wheelchair into and out of gear. You may even want to put brightly colored tape on your "brakes" to make them easier to identify in the event of an emergency.
- Explain to firefighters what you are, and are not, capable of physically and/or cognitively.
- Explain to the firefighters if symptoms of your disability could be confused with alcohol or drug intoxication (slurred speech, unsteady gait, dizziness, confusion).
- Have your caregivers educate the firefighters if you have any communication difficulties.

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- Answer any questions the firefighters may have for you.

There is currently no research to support an increased risk of crime with the presence of this sticker on the home.

Cognitive Considerations

- Recognize that you may have slower reaction time to respond to a dangerous situation.
- Cognitive deficits can make it difficult to notice and react to uncommon stimuli, such as the ability to immediately recognize smoke or that the smell of smoke indicates danger.
- Post the evacuation plan in your room in order to remember the steps in an emergency.

For additional resources on emergency preparedness and the RESCUE program visit: <http://www.shepherd.org/resources/rescue>

Carries and Evacuations

The following tips are for those assisting you to safety:

Proper Body Mechanics

- Keep your hips under your shoulders.
- Use your legs to lift, not your back or arms.
- Keep the object close to your center of mass (COM), which is close to your belly button.
- Don't twist, keep your feet and hips turned in direction that you are moving, or shift weight from one leg to another.
- Adjust the height of the bed or put one knee on the bed to allow you to get closer to the person and keep your hips under your shoulders.

Sheet over toes

- On the floor, bring knees to chest, fold sheet over toes and knees, criss-cross the sheet and tuck the ends of the sheet behind each knee.
- Perform this carry with 2 strong people along each side or positioned at the corners.
- Be sure to communicate, use proper body mechanics and all lift straight up at the same time.
- If you are evacuating a person with a higher level of tetraplegia, make sure the sheet is high enough to support the neck and head as you go down the stairs or ramp.

2 person lift

- Performed with the stronger person at the trunk and one person scooping the legs from the side for more control descending the stairs or ramp.
- Be sure to communicate, use proper body mechanics and both lift straight up at the same time.

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- Remind the individual being evacuated to bear down with their arms to prevent injuring the shoulders.

Sheet Drag

- If you find yourself at home with only one other person the best option is to get on the floor onto a sheet or blanket and have someone drag you out to safety.

Options for getting someone out of the bed with one caregiver

- Turn the mattress sideways and have it act as a slide to lower the person to the floor.
- Swing legs off the side of the bed first and then lower torso and head to the floor.
- Use the sheet to lower the person to the floor.

Getting someone out of power wheelchair with one caregiver

- Remove chest strap and seat belt.
- Flip up footplate or remove leg rests.
- Lower person to the side down to the floor by holding onto torso.

FIRE SAFETY MUST START AT HOME

Kitchen

- In some situations, it may be recommended that some individuals with cognitive impairments not be allowed to cook at all, while others can be allowed to cook with the proper equipment and guidelines in place.
- At first, it may be recommended that someone be in the kitchen at all times while the individual with a brain injury is cooking to increase safety. This is to ensure that:
 - Stove burners are properly turned off.
 - Stove burners are set to the appropriate cooking level.
 - Flammable items such as paper towels or a kitchen towel are not left near burners or fire.
 - Food is not left unattended while it is cooking, even for a minute.
- Wear tight fitting clothing when cooking over an open flame.
- Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove so they cannot be pulled down.
- Never overload extension cords with too many wires and do not place in high traffic areas.
- Replace appliances that begin to produce smoke or have frayed wires.
- While using a microwave, do not cook items for too long or place inappropriate objects in the microwave (i.e. metal).
- Use check lists while cooking so that no step is missed – including turning the stove off!
- Stick to familiar cooking routines.
- Some individuals may benefit from adaptive equipment to increase their safety while cooking, such as a stove that turns itself off if it has been left on for a certain period of time.

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At Home

- Avoid the use of matches and candles.
- Use check lists while ironing or have supervision from a friend or family member to increase safety.
- If you smoke, never leave your smoking materials unattended and never smoke in bed!
- Make sure you have leave at least 3 feet between a space heater and any flammable materials.
- Keep flammable materials outside your home, such as gasoline or propane.

RESOURCES

National Fire Protection www.nfpa.org/disabilities

A detailed Personal Emergency Evacuation Planning Checklist can be found at this website.

United States Fire Administration www.usfa.dhs.gov

This organization will mail complimentary pamphlets including “Fire Risks for the Mobility Impaired” and “Protecting Your Family from Fire.”

National Fire Protection Association www.nfpa.org

You can find a copy of the “Personal Emergency Evacuation Planning Checklist.”

United Spinal Association www.spinalcord.org/pdf/Wheel_chairFireSafety.pdf

Download a free brochure about fire safety for wheelchair users at work and at home.

American Red Cross www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/disability.html

Practical Survival Strategies for Natural Disasters

- Know what natural disasters are common in your area and when they typically strike.
- Keep yourself informed!
- Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) send free information text messages to WEA-enable cell phones within range of an imminent and dangerous local situation, severe weather event, or AMBER emergency.
- To find out if your mobile device is capable of receiving WEA alerts, contact your mobile device carrier or visit CTIA The Wireless Association at www.CTIA.org.
- The Emergency Alert System (EAS) can address the entire nation on very short notice in case of a grave threat or national emergency. Ask if your local radio and TV stations participate in EAS.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio (NWR) is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information directly from a nearby National Weather Services office to specially configured NOAA weather radio receivers. Determine

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if NOAA Weather Radio is available where you live. If so, consider purchasing a NOAA weather radio receiver.

- The Red Cross has several smart phone apps available that can help keep you informed of tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and shelters available in your area.
- Read Georgia also has a great smart-phone app with lots of good information.
- Be prepared. Contact the Emergency Management Agency for your county and register. By doing this you will ensure yourself accessible transportation if evacuation from you home becomes necessary because of a community disaster.
- Sometimes the equipment people are allowed to take to a shelter is limited due to space limitations. If you are allowed only one piece of equipment at the shelter, your wheelchair cushion may be a good option.
- When you register with the EMS, make it clear that you are dependent for mobility without your wheelchair. This may increase your chances of getting to keep your wheelchair with you at the shelter.
- In the event of a community disaster requiring evacuation, accessible shelters can be found at: www.redcross.org or on the Red Cross Shelter smart phone app.
- If you have your own transportation to get to a shelter or out of town, gas stations may be closed during emergencies and unable to pump gas during power outages.
- Be sure to keep at least ½ tank of gas in your vehicles at all times.
- Make your local utilities companies are aware of your medical needs ahead of time- they will likely put you on a list to have your services restored more quickly.
- Your basic supplies should include 72 hours-worth of water, food, necessary medications and supplies for everyone in your home. Keep you bowel and bladder/hygiene needs in mind when decided how much water to keep on hand. You should have a battery-powered radio and flashlight with extra batteries, as well. Detailed recommendations for a basic disaster supplies kit can be found at: <http://www.ready.gov/kit>
- Consider purchasing a generator for your home, especially if you use a ventilator or other specialty medical equipment.
- If you use a power wheelchair, make sure you have a back-up manual wheelchair in case you are not able to charge the battery. In additional, manual wheelchairs will be easier to transport than power chairs if you must evacuate the area quickly.
- Have a plan to get out of town if necessary, including people who expect you to come stay with them in the event of an emergency who live out of town. Make sure you have written/printed direction to their homes—Good Maps may not be an option, and some roads may be close.
- Keep up-to-date on your medication refills so you always have some medication on hand.
- Do you have a safe, accessible place to go in your home/work/school in the event of a tornado?
- What about money? If the power is out ATMs and credit card readers may not be working. Keep enough cash on hand to get you out of town!