

# Guidelines for Developing an Emergency Evacuation Plan That Includes Individuals With Disabilities

Created by: District of Columbia Public Schools/Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization

Individuals with disabilities who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances may have to rely on the help of others in an emergency. The quick, safe, and efficient evacuation of an entire school during an emergency can only be accomplished through careful planning and preparation. When planning and implementing your building's Emergency Evacuation Plan, incorporate the following suggested procedures to address any special needs of disabled individuals.

## Definition of Terms

**Disabled**—refers to a temporary or permanent disability that would delay or impede the ability of an individual to evacuate the building in an emergency (such as, but not limited to, individuals requiring the use of a wheelchair, cane, crutches, prosthetic device, or those with sensory impairments).

**Areas of Rescue Assistance**—an area which has direct access to an exit, where people who are unable to use stairs may remain temporarily in safety to await further instruction or assistance during emergency evacuation.

## Actions to Take Prior to Emergency Situations

**Organize Evacuation Committee for the Disabled**—Identify your in-school team charged with developing your site-specific emergency evacuation plan for students, employees, and/or visitors with disabilities. This team must include at least one building administrator. Other suggested team members include:

- Employees with disabilities;
- Students with disabilities and/or their parents; and
- Staff members trained and/or experienced in working with individuals with disabilities such as:
  - School nurse;
  - Physical therapist;
  - Special education teacher; and
  - Guidance counselor.
- Teachers;
- Clerical staff members;
- Students (secondary schools);
- Building service workers; and
- Any staff members trained as an EMT or firefighter.

**Consult with experts for assistance**—Consult with the experts from the following agencies for assistance with developing your school's emergency evacuation plan for the disabled:

***Public service agencies—***

- Fire and EMS department officials;
- Emergency medical personnel (fire & EMS departments); and
- Police department officials.

***Other suggested contacts—***

- Safety unit;
- Maintenance; and
- Local hospitals (trauma centers).

**Identify All Accessible Exits**

- Contact the Safety Unit to assist in inspecting your facility to determine which building exits are accessible.
- If all exits are not accessible, update your posted floor plan diagrams that identify emergency exit routes to include accessible routes to the nearest accessible exits.

**Identify Areas of Rescue Assistance**

Identify *Areas of Rescue Assistance* on each level of the building above or below the level of accessible exit discharge. Areas of Rescue Assistance may include a portion of a stairway landing within a smoke-proof enclosure, rooms protected by smoke- and flame-resistant doors, and any other fire-safe areas approved by the appropriate fire department officials.

- Contact Fire & EMS Department officials and the Safety Unit to inspect your facility and determine the most appropriate locations for Areas of Rescue Assistance.
- Designate backup or secondary Areas of Rescue Assistance in the event that the emergency renders the first area unavailable.
  - Post signs to identify each Area of Rescue Assistance within your building. Post additional signs visible from the outside of your building to enable emergency responders to quickly locate Areas of Rescue Assistance.
  - Update your posted floor plan diagram that identifies emergency exit routes to include routes to the nearest areas of rescue assistance. Identify students and employees with disabilities assigned to your faculty. Note the type of impairment and the level of assistance required to safely evacuate them from the facility.
  - Compile a list of all students and employees with disabilities that might affect their ability to evacuate safely.

At the beginning of each school year, each school administration should compile a list of those disabled individuals who may require assistance in evacuating the building. Update this list at least monthly to reflect any changes that occur during the school year.

- Prepare schedules and classroom assignments that locate individuals with mobility impairments in areas closest to an accessible exit or an area of rescue assistance. Institute other scheduling changes that will increase the safety of evacuations.
- Develop a master schedule showing the location(s) of those disabled students and employees who require evacuation assistance.

Each school should maintain a master schedule showing the assigned locations of all persons with disabilities who require assistance to evacuate the building. We suggest that the locations of each affected student and employee be marked on a floor plan diagram. Update this schedule to reflect any changes that occur during the course of the year. This schedule should be maintained in the main office or at any other assigned locations for emergency preparedness records.

### **Determine Special Needs**

Determine what if any assistance each disabled individual may require to safely evacuate your building. When determining the most effective methods of evacuation, consideration should be given to the size and weight of the individual, distance required to reach the assembly area, and obstacles such as steps, curbs, streets, intersections, traffic, etc. Listed below are some general examples of ways to assist the disabled:

#### ***Assisting the visually impaired—***

- Offer to assist the visually impaired person to a safe location.
- Never grab a visually impaired person's arm. Ask him or her to hold your arm or elbow as you make your way to the nearest exit.
- Give verbal instruction or information as you travel.

#### ***Assisting the hearing impaired—***

- Get the attention of the person with a hearing impairment by touch and eye contact and alert them that an emergency exists.
- Have written notes ready, if appropriate, which explain the existence and nature of the emergency.
- Offer gestures to provide information and instruction.

***Assisting the mobility impaired—***Most mobility impaired persons, if on the ground floor of a building, will be able to exit safely without assistance. When mobility-impaired persons are located in portions or levels of a building without accessible exit, assist the person as directed to the nearest Area of Rescue Assistance.

- Accompany the mobility-impaired person to the nearest Area of Rescue Assistance. It may be necessary to clear the exit route of debris so that the person with the mobility impairment can move.
- Once within the area of rescue assistance, wait for the fire department to evacuate the mobility impaired person.
- Key points to address before transporting mobility impaired:

- Determine how many people are needed to move the person up or down the stairs.
  - Determine the ability of the person to extend or move his or her extremities when lifting due to pain, catheters, leg bags, spasticity, braces, respirators, etc.
- For wheelchair users
    - Determine the ability of the person to be physically removed from the wheelchair.
    - When lifting a manual wheelchair, determine which points on the wheelchair the rescue persons should hold on to for lifting.
    - Never take an electric wheelchair up or down stairs. Abandon the chair and move the person to safety.
    - Untrained persons should never attempt to move persons with mobility impairments up or down stairs.
  - Determine the number of people you will need to provide the necessary assistance for every disabled individual.
  - Determine any special medical needs that students and employees may require. Determine if any special equipment or apparatus must accompany the students or employees when evacuated from the building. Compile a list of these special needs and update it as necessary.
  - Inform staff members of their responsibilities.
  - Inform staff members of their responsibilities for assisting with the evacuation of disabled individuals. Consider the nature and degree of the disabling condition when determining the most appropriate assisting staff members.

***For students***—In an emergency, the responsibility for assisting the disabled student should be assigned to the teacher or person in charge of the student at that time. As the student changes locations throughout the school day, responsibility will shift to the next person in charge of the student. School administrators and/or the school nurse may also be appropriate staff members to assist in evacuations.

For example, other students receiving instruction from the teacher assigned to assist the disabled student will be escorted from the building by a teacher from an adjoining classroom. That teacher will develop a list from the other class to be used for roll call to ensure that all persons have evacuated the building. If more than one student requiring assistance is assigned to the same location at the same time, more than one person will most likely need to be assigned to assisting the students.

***For employees***—Responsibility for providing evacuation assistance for a disabled employee should be assigned to the staff member who works closest to the employee. Again, this responsibility will shift as the employee works in different locations of the building throughout the day.

***For visitors***—Responsibility for providing evacuation assistance to visitors should be assigned to staff members already assigned the duty of checking areas of the building (such as lavatories) to make sure that all areas are clear during an emergency. Given unpredictable visitors, those assisting them may not be able to evacuate them on their own. In such cases, the staff member

should assist the visitor to an Area of Rescue Assistance and seek assistance from other staff members or from professional rescue personnel.

- Assign an administrative staff member to inform any Emergency Responders (fire fighters, police, etc.) of the number, identity, and locations of any disabled individuals who could not be evacuated from the building and/or those who require special medical attention. Representatives of the school and emergency responders should meet at a prearranged location.
- Assign backup staff members for each of these responsibilities.

### **Providing Training**

- Those individuals who will carry out special duties for assisting in the evacuation of others must be trained in the assistance they will need to offer.
- When staff members are required to lift and carry others, they must be trained in proper lifting and carrying techniques. Untrained persons should never attempt to move persons with mobility impairments up or down stairs.
- With fast response times of the DC fire department and their specialized training, they will evacuate all disabled persons from the Area of Rescue Assistance.

### **Executing Emergency Evacuation Procedures**

- Never use elevators, chair lifts, or any other system requiring electrical power in an emergency.
- In most cases, delay exiting persons with disabilities until the exit route is clear of traffic. This is for the disabled person's safety as well as for the safety of others. For example, where a person will be carried down sets of stairs, it is much safer to wait until the stairs are free of quicker moving traffic.
- Ensure that appropriate staff members account for all individuals with disabilities immediately after notification that an emergency exists. Inform the appropriate administrator immediately of anyone who cannot be accounted for.
- Ensure that appropriate staff members assist individuals with disabilities in moving to their predetermined Areas of Rescue Assistance, and assist them in exiting the building.
- Ensure that appropriate staff members assisting individuals with disabilities remain with them until the emergency is over.
- Upon arrival of Emergency Responders, ensure that an administrative staff member meets with them at a prearranged location with information on number, identity, and locations of individuals with disabilities who are still in the building. Also, provide a copy of the list that describes any special medical needs that students or employees may have as well as any special equipment or apparatus that may be needed.

### **Practicing Emergency Evacuation Procedures**

When conducting your monthly evacuation drills, incorporate all aspects of your evacuation plan for the disabled in at least during two drills a year.

During these drills, it may *not* be advisable to evacuate all disabled persons from the building. In certain cases, the potential risk of injury may outweigh the benefits of conducting the drill. Discuss these health or safety concerns with your local fire department representatives. Under these special circumstances, during drills you only may be able to evacuate those individuals to the appropriate designated Areas of Rescue Assistance.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of each evacuation drill. Include all students and staff members involved in using the disabled evacuation procedures. Make adjustments and recommend necessary changes to the established procedures in consultation with the appropriate crisis agencies.
- Discuss and review this evacuation procedure frequently with all staff members.
- Review and update your building's evacuation plan.
- Keep your plan current to reflect changes in your building that might impact on the safe evacuation of your building. At minimum, building administrators must review and update their building's evacuation plan on an annual basis.