

Disabled Persons

Persons using crutches, canes or walkers:

In emergency evacuations, these individuals should be treated as if they were injured. Have the individual sit on a sturdy chair, preferably a chair with arms, and follow the procedure for non-ambulatory persons discussed below.

Non-ambulatory persons:

Evacuation may not be necessary or advisable. Many stairwells are designed to provide temporary protection from fire or other danger. An able bodied volunteer shall stay with a wheelchair user on the stairwell platform while a second person notifies emergency personnel or paramedics of the exact location of the wheelchair user. If immediate evacuation is necessary, be aware of the following considerations:

1. Wheelchairs have movable parts; some are not designed to withstand stress or lifting.
2. You may need to remove the chair batteries; life-support equipment may be attached.
3. In a life-threatening emergency, it may be necessary to remove an individual from their wheelchair. Use caution, as lifting persons with restricted mobility, may cause them bodily harm or injury.
4. Wheelchairs should not be used to descend stairwells. Use an emergency evacuation chair.
5. Non-ambulatory persons may have respiratory complications. Take them to a location away from smoke or fumes. Ask them if they have any needs or preferences.
6. Check the evacuation routes for obstructions before assisting the person to the exit.
7. Delegate other volunteers to collect the wheelchair.
8. Return the person to their wheelchair as soon as it is safe to do so.

Providing Assistance

Always consult with people in the wheelchairs, asking them how you might assist them; i.e.,

1. The number of people they require for assistance.
2. Methods to remove them from the wheelchair.
3. Taking precautions for pain, catheters, catheter-bags, limb-plasticity, braces, etc.
4. Whether to carry them face-forward or -backward down a flight of stairs.
5. Whether a seat cushion or pad shall be brought along, should the wheelchair be left behind.
6. In lieu of a wheelchair, ask if they prefer a stretcher, cushioned- or padded-chair, or car seat.
7. Whether paramedic assistance is required.

The visually impaired:

Most visually impaired persons shall be familiar with their immediate work area. In an emergency situation, describe the nature of the emergency and offer to act as a “sighted guide.” Offer your elbow and escort them to a safe place. As you walk, describe where you are and advise them of any obstacles. When you have reached safety, orient the person as to where you are and ask if any further assistance is needed.

The hearing impaired:

Because persons with impaired hearing may not hear emergency alarms, alternative warning techniques are required. Two methods are:

1. Write a note describing the emergency and nearest evacuation route, “Fire. Go out rear door, to the right, and down. Now!”
2. Turn the light switch off and on to get their attention, then indicate with gestures what is happening and what to do.