

Emergency Guidelines for the Disabled

Be a survivor! Don't let an emergency catch you completely unprepared. The time to plan your evacuation is not during an emergency. Always be aware of your situation in any building that you enter. Visit the Emergency Information page at www.mnstate.edu/security for more complete emergency information.

The following are some guidelines for people with disabilities to keep in mind regarding building evacuation:

Elevators

If a fire alarm has sounded, the elevators in most buildings will not operate normally. If an elevator *is* operating, do not use it. In a serious fire situation, an elevator may stop and open its doors on a floor that is consumed with flames. If there is an electrical fire, the function of the elevators may also be impaired. Use the elevator **ONLY** when instructed to do so by a fire department representative who has assessed the situation.

Know Your Needs

No one understands the unique circumstances of your particular disability better than you. Communicate your special needs to those aiding you.

Example

If you are visually-impaired, explain that it is best to allow you to take their arm so they may guide you (rather than taking hold of you to direct you to a location).

Buddies

It is a good idea to solicit volunteers to be your emergency "buddy" or "buddies". They should be people that you work with, or have classes with [in some cases you may need a different buddy(s) for each class], and that are willing to spend some time discussing your special needs in the event of an emergency.

Discuss the best ways to aid you in an emergency **before** an emergency occurs. Buddies should be people who are willing to take this responsibility seriously, and who are physically fit to assist. You can ask your instructor or supervisor to aid you in discretely locating a buddy. In a classroom setting, identify yourself to your instructor in private at the beginning of the semester. They can request volunteers from the classroom and forward information to you for contact. Disabled instructors should use this opportunity to make arrangements for their own student buddies as well.

If there is not an immediate danger, you may choose to ask them to help you find a safe location to await rescue by emergency responders. Stairways may be crowded and chaotic due to evacuation conditions. Heavy electrical chairs **MUST** be left behind.

Lifting techniques should be learned and discussed with established "buddies" prior to an emergency. If you do not know the proper procedures and precautions for lifting you, discuss this with your doctor so you are prepared.

In Place Protection

If you must remain in a building during an emergency, make sure that someone (a buddy, instructor, or passer-by) is aware of where you are, and that you are awaiting rescue. Have them note:

- room number or exact location within the floor,
- floor and wing,
- window locations
- name of the individual and their condition
- telephone number of the location if applicable

Stay in a room with an operating phone and closing door. If you can not operate the phone, have your buddy call for you from the room, or after they have exited the building. Stay near open stairways or elevators. Remain in these areas only if it is safe to so.

Areas of Rescue

Where there are no established areas of refuge, find a location on the floor you are on that is relatively safe from immediate danger. It is preferred that the area have an operating phone so that you can call 9-911 (emergency services dispatch) and ensure that your presence in the building is known. If there is a fire situation, a room away from the fire with a closing door is best. Use what you can find to block smoke from entering the room from under the door (use part of your clothing if you can find no other material.) If there is a window, place some sign on it to alert people outside that you are in this location (especially if you have no operating phone). Use what you can find (lipstick, a bright shirt, a notebook, etc.). Do **not** break the window in the event of a fire! This may aid the spread of a fire into your area or allow exterior smoke to enter your room. Do this only if you need to exit through the window or are in immediate danger from smoke. If after communicating your location you must leave this area due to imminent danger, make every attempt to communicate your new location to rescuers.

Buddies or assistants should ensure that you know the general location within the building so you can communicate this via phone if need be. Ask buddies to dial 9-911 for you, close doors, etc. Once the buddy/assistant has evacuated the building, they should contact on-scene emergency personnel about your *exact* location.

Know Your Surroundings

Familiarize yourself with your surroundings. This is very important. When visiting a new building, look around for the exits. If you are hearing-impaired, verify if there are visual aids to alert you of an alarm condition. Where are these alarms? If there are none, make certain that people in the area know where you are and can let you know if there is an emergency. If you are visually-impaired, practice your escape via various routes. Never rely solely on one means of

egress. If you are on crutches, understand that the stairs will be a dangerous place for you during the initial evacuation. Think about your particular situation and be prepared.

Remain Calm

Many alarm conditions end up being minor situations. Assess your unique situation before taking undue risks. However, **never** ignore an alarm condition! Take action!

Your Responsibility

Ultimately you are responsible for your safety. Inform an instructor, employer, co-worker, or friend of your special needs in the event of an emergency. They may not be aware of your condition, or may not have thought of your particular situation in the event of an emergency. Use the buddy system! Plan ahead, and be aware!