

# Fire Safety for People with Disabilities

## Plan Around Your Abilities

If you have a disability, consider how it could affect your ability to escape a fire in your home. Call your local fire department and ask guidance from a fire educator. Talk to other members of your household about your special needs.

Every home should have an escape plan and all members of the household should practice it at least twice a year. You, and everyone you live with, should know at least two ways out of every room and every way out of the building. If your disability requires special arrangements, make them part of the escape plan.

For example, if you cannot escape on your own, designate a member of the household to help you and decide on backups in case the person isn't home.

- **Know your exits.** It is especially important for people with limited mobility to sleep near an exit. If you live in a multi-level home, it is best to sleep on the ground floor and near an exit. Install a telephone extension or have a cordless phone in your room. Consider having ramps constructed for emergency exits.
- **Install smoke alarms.** Smoke alarms save lives by warning you about fire in time for you to escape. Have a smoke alarm installed outside your sleeping area. If you sleep with the doors closed, have one installed inside as well. If you have difficulty hearing, there are smoke alarms that flash a light as well as sound an alarm. There are also smoke alarms that sound a lower pitch that may be easier for people with impaired hearing to hear.

All smoke alarms should be tested monthly and their batteries changed once a year (or sooner if they "chirp" to tell you the batteries are low). Smoke alarms can be tested by using a broom handle to push the test button.

Consider installing an automatic home fire sprinkler system. Sprinklers can contain and even extinguish a home fire in less time than it takes the fire department to arrive.

- **Sleep near a phone.** The majority of fatal home fires happen at night, and you may have to escape through smoke or in the dark. If you are unable to leave on your own, call the fire department and tell them where you are. If you have a cordless phone, try to take it with you if you have to escape a fire.

## Keep a flashlight handy

Have a working flashlight in your sleeping area. You may need it to escape in the dark or signal firefighters if you are trapped by a fire.

- **Alert your fire department.** Make your fire department aware of your disability and ask them for suggestions for making your living situation safer and your escape easier.

## Escape Tips

If your smoke alarm goes off, do not hesitate. Respond immediately, following your escape plan. If you have a cordless phone, take it with you when you escape.

If you need help, **Yell** -- The person designated to help you may not know there is a fire. If he or she does not arrive quickly, call the fire department.

- **Test doors before you open them.** Before opening a door to escape, reach up as high as you can and touch around the door -- at the knob and around the frame -- with the back of your hand. If it is cool, open the door cautiously and be ready to slam it shut if there is smoke or flame on the other side.
- **Crawl low under smoke to your exit.** If you encounter smoke while you are escaping, try another escape route. If you must escape through smoke, crawl on your hands and knees, keeping your head 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 centimeters) above the floor, where the air will be cleaner. If you are unable to do this, return to a room away from the fire and call the fire department.

## If You Cannot Escape

If blocked exit paths or mobility problems prevent you from escaping, close as many doors as you can between you and the fire. Use duct tape or cloth to seal around doors and cover all vents to keep smoke out. Call the fire department - - even if someone has already reported the fire -- and tell them exactly where you are trapped. Wait by a window to be rescued. If possible signal to firefighters by waving a flashlight beam or light-colored cloth.