



# Removing the Barriers

A Fire Safety Factsheet for People with Disabilities and their Caregivers

**M**ore than 4,000 Americans die each year in fires and more than 25,000 are injured. The risk of death or injury from fire is even greater for people with physical, mental or sensory disabilities. The good news is deaths resulting from failed emergency escapes are preventable through preparation.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) want people with disabilities, their caregivers and all Americans to know that there are special precautions you can take to protect yourself and your home from fire.

## UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

*Why are People with Disabilities at Risk?*

- People with disabilities should be more cautious because of physical limitations and a decreased ability to react in an emergency.
- People with disabilities are typically fiercely independent and do not wish to alter their lives from those of the general public. However, this can lead them to ignore their special fire safety needs. In some cases people with disabilities may need the help of a caregiver to practice proper fire safety precautions.

## INSTALL AND MAINTAIN SMOKE ALARMS

People with disabilities should be aware of the special fire warning devices that are available.

- Smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light are available for the deaf and hard of hearing. Additionally, smoke alarms with a strobe light outside the house to catch the attention of neighbors, and emergency call systems for summoning help are also available.
- Ask the manager of your building, or a friend or relative to install at least one smoke alarm on each level of your home.
- Make sure your smoke alarms are tested monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.

## LIVE NEAR AN EXIT

Although you have the legal right to live where you choose, you'll be safest on the ground floor if you live in an apartment building.

- If you live in a multi-story home, arrange to sleep on the first floor.
- Being on the ground floor and near an exit will make your escape easier.

## PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

Plan your escape around your capabilities.

- Know at least two exits from every room.
- If you use a walker or wheelchair, check all exits to be sure you get through the doorways.
- Make any necessary accommodations, such as providing exit ramps and widening doorways, to facilitate an emergency escape.

## DON'T ISOLATE YOURSELF

People with disabilities have often been excluded from the development and practicing of escape plans and fire safety drills. As a result, their vital input is omitted and their fire safety needs remain unfulfilled. Speak up to ensure that all parties receive the fire safety information that everyone deserves.

- Speak to your family members, building manager, or neighbors about your fire safety plan and practice it with them.
- Contact your local fire department's non-emergency line and explain your special needs. They will probably suggest escape plan ideas, and may perform a home fire safety inspection and offer suggestions about smoke alarm placement and maintenance.
- Ask emergency providers to keep your special needs information on file.
- Keep a phone near your bed and be ready to call 911 or your local emergency number if a fire occurs.

## KNOW YOUR ABILITIES

Remember, fire safety is your personal responsibility...*Fire Stops With You!*

**For More Information Contact:**  
**The United States Fire Administration**  
Office of Fire Management Programs  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

**Or visit the USFA website:**  
**[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)**

**Visit our Kid's Page:**  
**[www.usfa.fema.gov/kids](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/kids)**

