EVACUATING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The following emergency evacuation description is written primarily to inform faculty, staff, and students of the procedures for assisting students with disabilities in the event of an emergency. However, a student with a disability must take personal responsibility for his/her own safety.

Read and review this information and know what is expected in each classroom, building, and residence hall in case of an alarm.

GROUND FLOOR

On a ground level floor, persons with physical disabilities should evacuate via accessible exits along with the other occupants of the building.

ABOVE OR BELOW GROUND FLOOR

Campus police should be notified immediately if there is a person with a mobility impairment on an above or below ground floor. It is preferable to call 765-285-1111 (instead of 911) because it connects to campus police directly.

INDIVIDUALS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

Because elevators should not be used for evacuation during a fire alarm, persons with mobility impairments will need assistance in evacuating unless they are on a ground floor with accessible exits. As persons with mobility impairments have varying degrees of impairments, information is offered for two possible scenarios.

Ambulatory

Persons with mobility impairments who are able to walk independently, either with or without the use of crutches or a cane, may be able to negotiate stairs in an emergency situation with minor assistance. Even some persons who customarily use a wheelchair or scooter for long distance travel may be able to walk independently in an emergency situation. If danger is imminent and the person is able to walk down stairs with some assistance, it is advisable that he/she wait until the heavy traffic has cleared before attempting to evacuate. Someone should walk beside him/her to provide assistance, if needed. If it is apparent that there is no immediate danger (obvious smoke or fire), the person may choose to stay in the building until emergency personnel arrive and determine the necessity to evacuate. In situations of false alarm or a small, isolated fire, evacuation of persons with mobility impairments may not be necessary at all; however, this decision should be made only by qualified emergency personnel.

If emergency personnel determine there is a need to evacuate a person, trained rescue workers will assist in the evacuation. Someone should alert emergency personnel as to the location of the individual if that person chooses to wait in the building. **Note: Persons on respirators should be given priority assistance in emergencies involving smoke or fumes because their ability to breathe is seriously jeopardized.**

Non-Ambulatory

Evacuation of non-ambulatory persons is much more complicated than that of others. In keeping with current philosophy and preference to “stay in place,” the most recent advice from fire and campus safety experts is that unless danger is imminent, a wheelchair user should remain in a room until emergency rescue personnel arrive and determine the necessity for evacuation.

If evacuation is not possible, immediately call campus police at 765-285-1111 to alert emergency personnel of the location so the evacuation can be completed. When possible, someone should remain in the facility with the person with the disability.

EVACUATING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

If a non-ambulatory person chooses to evacuate (and if appropriate assistance is available) ask how he/she can best be assisted or moved, and whether there are any special considerations or items that need to come with the person. Again, in case of a false alarm or a small, isolated fire, it may not be necessary to risk a complicated evacuation—but only qualified emergency personnel should make such a decision.

In the event of immediate danger (e.g., fire, smoke, etc.) it is advisable for the wheelchair user to move horizontally within the facility to a safer area. Go to a room with an exterior window and telephone, and wait (with the doors closed) for the rescue personnel to arrive. Only in situations of extreme danger should untrained people attempt to manually evacuate wheelchair users. Doing so may involve dangers of its own, especially if there is limited assistance or if multiple floors are involved. There is additional risk if the person has quadriplegia with limited neck, arm, and trunk control; if spasticity is a factor; or if apparatuses such as respirators, catheters, etc. are involved.

It is never safe to move someone by lifting a wheelchair down the stairs. Wheelchairs can be extremely heavy, and have many moveable parts and vulnerable points that are not constructed to withstand the stress of lifting.

Again, while it is best to let professional emergency personnel (firefighters with oxygen equipment) conduct the evacuation, a person with a mobility limitation can be carried by two people who have interlocked their arms to form a "chair," or by carrying the person in a sturdy office chair in the case of extreme emergency. **Note: The person with the disability is the best authority about how to be moved.**

INDIVIDUALS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS

Most persons with vision impairments should be familiar with their immediate surroundings. In the event of an emergency, tell the person with a vision impairment the nature of the emergency and offer to guide the person to the nearest emergency exit. Have the person take your elbow and escort him or her out of the building. As you walk, tell the person where you are and advise of any obstacles. When you reach safety, orient the person to where he/she is and ask if any further assistance is needed.

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Some persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may not perceive audio emergency alarms and will need to be alerted to the situation by gestures or by turning the light switch off and on. Emergency instructions can be given by verbalizing or mouthing, or by a short, explicit note. **Example: Fire alarm! Go out south doors now!** It is appropriate to offer assistance to a deaf or hard of hearing person as you leave the building.

CONTACT US

Do you have questions about this form, our services, or disability access at Ball State?

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