

EVACUATION OF PERSONS WHO MAY REQUIRE ASSISTANCE IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE ALARM ACTIVATION.

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1. Introduction

This guidance note has been prepared to provide advice and guidance to employers or designated Heads of departments for the safe evacuation in the event of an emergency, for staff and others who for what ever reason, will require assistance to leave the building.

This guidance note is not exhaustive and it will be the responsibility of the employer or designated Heads of departments to ensure that reasonable measures are in place for the safe evacuation of persons requiring assistance.

2. Legislation

The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (as amended 1999) requires provision to be made for the safe evacuation of people from a building in the event of an emergency situation. It is essential that any special needs of any employee or visitor to a building be taken into account when planning fire safety arrangements and evacuation procedures. However, an appropriate method of evacuation can only be arrived at after discussion with the individual and with due consideration of their specific needs.

3. Definitions

The following phrases are explained in Appendix 1:

- Protected Escape Route,
- Refuges,
- Evacuation Chairs
- Buddy System

4. Responsibilities

It is recommended that employers and their designated department heads establish a formal disabled persons emergency policy in order to ensure compliance with the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 as amended and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Such a policy should include:

- A procedure whereby all members of staff, visitors and members of the public are informed of fire safety arrangements which are in place for persons who require assistance to evacuate the building. An appropriate means of communication in this respect can include details of the arrangements being given in the local health and safety policy and notices being displayed within a building, (See Appendix 2).
- A process whereby the heads of department or other nominated member of staff engage in dialogue with the disabled persons who are using the building, to agree a procedure for their safe evacuation. Where agreement cannot be reached, external advice and information should be sought from the fire safety manager or specialist agency.
- Implement and incorporate the agreed measures into the premises fire evacuation procedures and update fire action plans
- Identify the need for and arrange the provision of any necessary equipment
- Arrange regular staff training in respect of the procedures and use of equipment
- Continue to assess and review evacuation procedures in premises under their control to which disabled persons have access.

The fire safety manager should be available to assist heads of department or other nominated members of staff in implementation of this policy.

5. Actions by Persons Requiring Assistance

All persons within the workplace have a duty of care placed upon them under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to ensure that they themselves remain safe and all other users of the workplace or persons affected by their activities remain safe. In this respect it is important that persons requiring assistance to evacuate make that requirement known. Failure to do so could result in designated staff conducting an evacuation being put at greater risk or even subsequent rescue attempts by the fire service being compromised by unnecessary additional risk.

On entering the building for the first time, a person who for any reason will require assistance should:

- Familiarise themselves with the established procedures of the building. (Fire action notices detailing this procedure are sited throughout the building);
- Contact a member of staff to arrange for the appropriate nominated person to discuss an agreed fire evacuation plan;
- Co-operate with the agreed managerial procedures for safe evacuation in the event of fire.

6. Fire Evacuation Procedures

Accommodation

The person controlling the building has a duty to take account of the special needs of persons who may experience difficulties evacuating the workplace (particularly in an emergency).

Where persons, who may require assistance are employed within premises, consideration should be given to allocating appropriate accommodation, if this is reasonably practical, at ground floor level, as this will help make evacuation easier to achieve by avoiding the need to use stairs or lifts.

At this level, these persons would be able to evacuate the premise, with limited assistance, using the nearest available fire exit. If they have to move at a slower pace they should allow other persons to exit the building before them, this is to avoid congestion on staircases and potential accidents. It will also assist in the overall efficiency of the evacuation. Once able bodied persons have cleared the escape routes, persons requiring assistance can then continue their evacuation to a place of safety. Where accommodation is located at lower levels to facilitate better access, this should not preclude persons accommodated there from the opportunity of undertaking work of a higher grade that would normally be undertaken on floors other than the ground or first floors.

Upper Floors

The means of escape from a building should be based on the principle that members of staff, visitors and members of the public can reach a place of relative safety within a protected enclosure within a defined travel distance and within 2.5 /3 minutes. From the place of relative safety they should then be able to proceed to the final exit safely.

Whilst the majority of persons with special needs can achieve this independently, a member of staff should assist those persons who are experiencing difficulties, to the nearest refuge. Once all able-bodied persons have evacuated the building, the person requiring assistance can be evacuated in a controlled and safe manner.

People requiring assistance may be evacuated from a refuge in a number of ways:

- Walk out themselves with limited assistance;
- Walk out with greater assistance (two or more members of staff assisting);
- Use of a wheelchair with limited assistance;
- With the assistance of specialised equipment (evacuation chair)

Deciding on which method to use may depend on the following:

- The height of the building (the number of floors a person may require to be evacuated will decide if specialised equipment is required);
- The availability of staff (those who are suitably trained in the use of specialised equipment);
- Size and suitability of the stairs (does the stair width or design inhibit safe rescue?)

The Fire Service will be in attendance within minutes of the fire alarm activation and they will assist in the evacuation of persons with special needs according to their resources and assessment of the incident. However when producing a fire evacuation procedure the use of Fire Service personnel should not be relied upon as an integral part of the plan, rather as a contingency if the local fire evacuation procedure has failed.

Use of lifts

The use of a normal passenger or goods lift for evacuation purposes should not be permitted, as it is possible that persons may become trapped within the lift itself.

The only type of lift, which can be used for evacuation purposes, is a fire-fighting lift, subject to the agreement of the Fire Authority or an evacuation lift designed and installed in compliance with British Standard 5588 part 8. Where there is doubt as to the type of lift that may be installed within a building, management should formulate evacuation procedures that exclude the use of lifts until clarification as to the type of lift has been obtained. This information may be obtained from Local Building or Fire Authorities.

7. Points for consideration

Considerations regarding the assistance of people with impaired mobility during an evacuation:

In drawing up an evacuation plan, consideration should be given to the needs of persons with impaired mobility. If people use a wheelchair, or can only move about with the use of walking aids, their disability may be obvious. However, disabilities can sometimes be less obvious and staff are to some extent reliant upon people with disabilities to make their requirements known.

Notwithstanding this staff should remain vigilant in an emergency so that help can be given to those who need it, in particular the very young or the elderly. For some individuals mobility limitations may be temporary. Members of staff in the advanced stages of pregnancy or with broken limbs or other conditions may only be temporarily affected by mobility problems. However consideration must be given to their special needs in the emergency plan.

Whenever a person appears to have impaired mobility or in need of assistance during evacuation the following should be considered:

- Introduction of the 'Buddy System'. This is where a friend, colleague or member of staff will accompany the person to a protected enclosure
- Be prepared to allow able bodied persons to evacuate the premises first
- Be prepared to travel at a rate that is comfortable to the person with impaired mobility
- Assess the need for specialised equipment

Whenever wheelchair users are occupying the building the following should be considered:

- Identify the location of the nearest wheelchair refuge and make it known to the user;
- Identify if a wheelchair user can reach the refuge unaided. If not consider the introduction of the 'Buddy System'
- Identify the best method of evacuation or if there is a need for the provision of specialised equipment
- Wheelchair users should be encouraged to determine and practice their preferred method for transferring from the wheelchair to the specialised evacuation equipment where appropriate. It is likely that they will already be very experienced in transferring from the wheelchair to other forms of seating.
- Where a two or more stage fire alarm system is installed, persons requiring assistance should start their evacuation at the 'prepare to evacuate' stage of the alarm.

Considerations regarding the assistance of people with impaired vision

People with impaired vision or colour perception may experience difficulty in seeing or recognising fire safety signs. Fire safety signs should comply with the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996 and be sufficiently large and well designed with a good, clear typeface and sited so that they can be seen easily and are readily distinguishable.

Staff and visitors with impaired vision should be familiarised with escape routes, especially those that are not in general use.

In an evacuation of a building, a designated, sighted person should lead those members of staff with impaired vision to safety. It is recommended that a sighted person should lead, inviting the other person to grasp their elbow, as this will enable the person being assisted to walk half a step behind and thereby gain information about doors and steps etc. Similar assistance should be offered to guide dog owners, with the owner retaining control of their dog.

A sighted member of staff should remain with the visually impaired until the emergency is over.

Good lighting and the use of simple colour contrasts can also help visually impaired people find their way around.

Advice about this can be obtained from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom.

Considerations regarding the assistance of people with impaired hearing

Whilst it is recognised that persons with impaired hearing will be able to make their way to a place of safety independently, difficulties may be encountered in identifying the fire alarm. Consideration should be given to the following:

- If the person is a sole worker it may be appropriate to provide specialised equipment such as flashing lights or a vibrating device inter-linked to the fire alarm system
- Consider whether it is possible for a colleague or other member of staff to ensure that the person with impaired hearing has been alerted
- Consider the need for additional specialised equipment in sleeping accommodation.

Further advice can be obtained from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

Note: Where it is known that, for whatever reason, a person has not evacuated a building, this information must be passed to the fire service on their arrival.

Appendix 1. Definitions.

Protected Escape Route

A protected escape route may consist of a corridor or stair enclosure that, once entered, will lead directly to a place of safety via an emergency exit.

The escape route is separated from the rest of a building by fire-resisting construction, providing a minimum fire resistance of 60 minutes. Access to the escape routes is by 'Fire Doors' that provide a minimum fire resistance of 30 minutes. These doors are fitted with self-closing devices capable of closing the doors from all angles of swing.

Once inside a protected escape route, occupants are deemed to be in a place of relative safety.

In order to maintain a satisfactory standard employers or other responsible person having control of the building must give consideration to the following:

- No combustible material should be stored or sighted within protected stair enclosure.
(Open notice boards, paper/cardboard stored below stairs etc.)
- Stairways and corridors to be kept free from obstruction.
- A programme of inspection to ensure that all fire doors function properly and that any defects are immediately identified and repaired.

Refuges

A refuge is an area normally sited within an enclosure such as a protected lobby, protected corridor or protected stairway, which provides a temporary safe area for people who will not be able to use stairways without assistance. The refuge normally needs to be big enough to allow wheelchair use and to allow the user to manoeuvre into the wheelchair space without undue difficulty.

It is essential that the location of any wheelchair spaces within a corridor or stair enclosure **do not adversely affect** the means of escape for other people by narrowing the escape route width.

In circumstances where the refuge area identified for a wheelchair user may restrict the free passage of others trying to evacuate the building, the area may still be suitable for use as a refuge providing that the wheelchair is manoeuvred into position after other persons have left that part of the building.

Evacuation Chairs

Evacuation chairs should be only operated by persons that have had training in their use. This equipment is specially designed for the evacuation of a person down a stair enclosure in a controlled and safe manner.

Whilst they are primarily for the use of wheelchair users, they can also be of assistance to those with impaired mobility for example chronic/asthmatic or heart conditions etc.

Buddy System


The 'Buddy System' is a procedure whereby a friend, colleague or staff member is allocated the responsibility of ensuring that the person, who may require assistance, is alerted of the need to evacuate a building and may assist that person in the evacuation.

Normally the person allocated this responsibility will be employed within the vicinity or work area of the person requiring assistance.

In order to maintain the continuity of the evacuation procedures, persons should be nominated to deputise for those allocated the responsibility in their absence.

Appendix 2

Example of a notice encouraging disabled persons to contact a member of staff:



EMERGENCY EVACUATION

**DO YOU NEED HELP TO EVACUATE
THE BUILDING?**

If you will require assistance to evacuate from the building
in the event of a fire alarm activation please contact a
member of staff immediately to make suitable
arrangements

Thank you