

Getting disabled visitors out safely in an emergency

**How to develop an effective emergency
evacuation plan for your building**



New law means managers of buildings have new responsibilities

On the 1st October 1999, Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act became law. This means that it is now your responsibility to alter your policies, and the way you work, to make it easier for disabled people to use your service. This includes developing emergency evacuation plans for disabled visitors.

We have produced this booklet to help you develop an emergency evacuation plan for disabled visitors, that is tailored to your building and service.

Obviously, it isn't possible to develop a plan that takes account of all the issues that may affect a particular building or service. For example, some buildings will have any number of visitors, including disabled visitors, dropping in at any time. Others will only have visitors when they have arranged a meeting with a member of staff. Also, the different designs of buildings make having just one, standard plan impossible. Each building needs an evacuation plan designed around it. And, it is not possible to develop a plan that will takes in all the different needs, or equipment requirements, of all disabled people. However, with careful management, it is possible to have a plan that will make sure they are evacuated safely.

Remember that it isn't just people in wheelchairs or who use walking sticks who will need help. You will need to think about how to help people with sight or hearing loss; people who have panic attacks and people who may not understand what is happening.

So your plan may need to be changed from building to building and service to service.

It is also vital that you consult with the Fire Safety Officer as soon as possible. You can contact them through the Fire Authority. If there are several departments in your building, it would make sense for you all to consult your Fire Safety Officer at the same time.

How to use this guide

We have split this booklet into three parts:

- **A step-by-step guide** which deals with various points in the evacuation process. This includes **a series of questions** to help you fill in the form and develop your own plan. It also includes **where to get more help**.
- **A form** to help you write your own evacuation plan.
- **A useful example** of a working plan for a large building (Merrion House). It deals with some of the problems they found when they had to evacuate their building.

Please remember, in an emergency **no member of staff should put themselves in danger**, and they should only help evacuate disabled people if this is safe.

How to produce your own emergency evacuation plan for disabled visitors

Things you need to think through

- How many disabled visitors your building gets – and where they'll be.
- Your building.
- What evacuation equipment disabled people may need.
- Training your staff to deal with emergency evacuations.
- What needs to happen when the fire alarm goes off.
- What to do when it is not possible to evacuate disabled visitors. **(You should only use this option when you have tried all other options).**
- Managing your evacuation plan.

How many disabled visitors your building gets – and where they'll be.

- You should estimate the number of disabled people who are likely to use your building. This should include where they might be at any one time.
- You should now be able to identify:
 - the safe routes for evacuating disabled people;
 - the most sensible assembly points for them; and
 - safe areas (if necessary).
- You should do a review of the rooms where staff meet the public. Where possible you should make sure that all meetings are held on the ground level or on the lowest floor possible within your building. If this is not always possible, you should make sure priority is given to meeting disabled people on these levels.
- If you share your building with more than one department it may be possible to share a lower-floor room when meeting disabled people.

Questions you need to answer to make sure your evacuation plan will work

These lists of questions (shown in a box after each section) will help you to complete your form and help make sure you have covered everything you need to. This will mean you can write your own, clear and complete evacuation plan for disabled visitors.

How many disabled visitors your building gets – and where they'll be

How many disabled visitors use your building?

Which areas are disabled visitors most likely to visit?

Do disabled visitors only use public areas?

What other areas do disabled visitors use?

Have you arranged for staff to meet with disabled visitors on the ground or lower floor?

Have you arranged for staff to share lower-floor meeting rooms with other departments?

Your building

- You should identify evacuation routes for disabled visitors. At the moment, you will tell staff and the public to evacuate by the nearest exit. This might not be best for disabled visitors or disabled staff. It might be best to direct disabled people to one exit route and keep them separate from non-disabled people. However, this may not be possible for your building. Where it is possible, disabled people should still be able to use the other exit routes if necessary.
- You should check all routes to make sure that any obstacles are removed or altered, for example, door thresholds. And you should make sure that all routes are well signed.
- In all areas where your visitors are likely to be on their own you should install flashing fire alarms. For example, disabled people's toilets, and toilets most likely to be used by visitors.
- You need to decide on the best assembly points for disabled people. When the alarm goes off, staff who are in meetings with disabled visitors will take their visitors to these areas. Staff who are trained in getting disabled people out safely will then meet the disabled people at the assembly point. They will bring any evacuation equipment that is needed and get the visitors out of the building.
- You should tell all visitors to your building about your evacuation plans. This should give disabled visitors the opportunity to tell a member of staff about their evacuation requirements. You can tell visitors about your plans in a number of ways, for example, by a clear sign at the reception point or next to the member of staff the visitors have come to meet. You may find that you can deal with this more easily if you get all visitors to sign in and out of your building.

Your building

Where are the safe evacuation routes in your building?

Have you decided to tell all disabled people to use a particular route?

Have you told all staff in your building about the route(s)?

Have you cleared all obstacles from all evacuation routes?

Have you made sure all evacuation routes are well signed?

Have you checked if there are any areas where disabled visitors are likely to be on their own, such as toilets?

Have you installed flashing fire alarms in these areas?

Where are the best assembly points for disabled people?

Have you told all staff in your building about these assembly points?

How do you tell disabled visitors about your evacuation plan?

Are there signs?

Where are they ?

What evacuation equipment disabled people may need.

- From your review, you should be able to estimate the likely numbers, and types, of equipment you will need to help disabled people evacuate your building safely. You should consult with any disabled people who regularly use your building or service to check their evacuation needs.
- Disabled staff who visit a building which isn't their normal base are responsible for telling that department if they need help to get out in an emergency.
- You should put evacuation equipment (such as evacuation chairs to carry disabled people down stairs) as near to the assembly points as possible. However, make sure the equipment isn't put in a position where disabled people transferring into them will hold up other people evacuating the building.
- You should keep one or more manual wheelchairs at the final exit point. Disabled visitors can then transfer from the evacuation chair, if they wish, and be taken to the fire assembly points.

What evacuation equipment disabled people may need

Have you asked your regular disabled visitors about their evacuation needs?

What evacuation equipment is needed in your building?

Have you decided where to put the equipment?

Is it near the identified assembly points?

Is it properly signed?

Have you put a manual wheelchair near the exit?

Training your staff to deal with emergency situations

- You must decide on the number of staff that you need to help disabled people evacuate the building. You need to think about the number of disabled visitors your building gets and the amount of evacuation equipment you are providing. You'll also need to have plenty of staff trained (in how to help disabled visitors) in case some staff are on holiday or off sick when there is an emergency.
- You need to train a significant number of staff who work in your building, or on each level of your building, in how to use the evacuation equipment and in how to lift disabled people safely. You will also need to train them in how to use your evacuation plan. We recommend that you do refresher training regularly with all these staff.
- It would help staff to understand the needs of disabled people if they also did disability equality training, training in guiding visually-impaired people and deaf equality training.

Training your staff to deal with emergency evacuations

Have you estimated *how many* staff will be needed to help evacuate disabled people from your building?

Have you identified *which* staff will help disabled people to get out of your building?

Where do they work?

Have they been trained how to use the evacuation equipment?

Have they been trained in how to lift disabled people safely?

Have they been trained in the evacuation plan?

How often will you arrange refresher training?

What needs to happen when the fire alarm goes off

- All the staff you have chosen (to evacuate disabled people) should go to the assembly point.
- All disabled visitors must be taken to the assembly point by the member of staff they are meeting. If staff have not already been told, they should ask what sort of help the disabled person needs.
- You should already have decided on fire wardens for your building. (These are staff who check all areas - where it is safe to go - to make sure no-one has been left behind). Make sure they know not to just rely on the ringing of the fire alarm to warn everyone to get out. There may be deaf or hearing-impaired people in the building.
- If there aren't any disabled people on the upper floors of your building, you should get evacuation equipment taken down to the lower floors where there may be disabled visitors.

What needs to happen when the fire alarm goes off

Have you told all staff where the assembly points are for disabled visitors?

Have you told all staff that, if they are meeting disabled visitors, it is their responsibility to take them to the assembly point?

Have you told the fire wardens for your building to look in all areas?

Have you told all staff to take evacuation equipment down to lower floors if the equipment is not needed on their floor?

What to do when you aren't able to get disabled visitors out of your building.

This option must **only** be used as a last resort where:

- you have a plan for evacuating disabled visitors from your building; and
- it does not meet the particular needs of an individual disabled visitor.

It must **never** be used as your main evacuation plan.

- Sometimes it may not be possible to evacuate disabled visitors. (This may be because equipment is not suitable for a particular disabled person or because of the lack of trained staff). If this happens, you should move the disabled person to a safe area until help arrives.
- Where a disabled visitor has been left in a safe area the responsible member of staff must immediately give the details to the Emergency Incident Officer, the Fire Warden and the Fire Service.

What to do when you aren't able
to get disabled visitors out of your building

What is your written plan for dealing with disabled visitors who you can't get out safely?

Where are the safe areas?

Have you told all staff where the safe areas are?

Who is responsible for telling the emergency services that a disabled visitor is still in your building?

Managing your evacuation plan

- When you are working out your plan you must consult with:
 - staff who are responsible for your building;
 - any regular disabled visitors;
 - disabled staff who work in your building;
 - key senior staff
 - health and safety staff; and
 - fire officers.
- You should identify a senior member of staff on each level of your building who is responsible for making sure the evacuation plan works for disabled people.
- You must write up your evacuation plan for disabled visitors. You must add this plan to any other evacuation plans you have.
- Staff who are meeting visitors (whether the visitors are disabled or not) are responsible for telling these visitors about the evacuation plan. They should do this at the start of their meeting. If the fire alarm goes off, they are also responsible for taking their disabled visitors to the assembly point.
- Staff should also tell all visitors if fire alarm tests are planned during their meeting. (This is particularly important for hearing-impaired people, so they can turn down their hearing aids).

Managing your evacuation plan

Have you written an evacuation plan for disabled visitors to your building?

Does it cover everything listed in these notes?

Who is responsible for health and safety in your building?

Have you involved them in the development of your plan?

Have you consulted your local fire officer about your plan?

Have you consulted disabled visitors and disabled staff?

Have you consulted any other staff?

Have you told all staff who meet members of the public about this plan?

Are they clear about what they need to do with their visitors?

Have you identified a senior member of staff on each level of your building who will be responsible for making sure the plan works?

Where to get more help

Access Officer
Building Consultancy
Department of Planning
Merrion House
Leeds
LS2 8SH

Anup Sharma
(Access Officer)
247-8215 (Minicom 247-4305)

Anup is happy to give advice to voluntary organisations and businesses in the Leeds area.

Your building's emergency evacuation plan for disabled visitors

Your department:

The name and address of your building:

Your name (you are the person responsible for evacuation plans):

Name(s) of staff responsible for the evacuation of disabled people (if different from you):

Number of floors in the building:

Number of floors you are responsible for:

Your plan then needs to give **full details** on **each** of these sections. Use the lists of questions (shown in boxes on previous pages) to help you.

- **How many disabled visitors your building gets – and where they'll be**
- **Your building**
- **What evacuation equipment disabled people may need**
- **Training your staff to deal with emergency evacuations**
- **What needs to happen when the fire alarm goes off**
- **What to do when you aren't able to get disabled visitors out of your building**
- **Managing your evacuation plan**

A useful example of an evacuation plan for a large building

Merrion House (10 floor office building)

Merrion House has had several emergency evacuations and it became clear to managers that their plan was not working for the evacuation of disabled employees and visitors.

Their plan told all staff and visitors to evacuate the building by the nearest safe exit route. In Merrion House these routes are the two, end staircases and the central staircase. However, disabled people who were being evacuated from the lower floors by Evac-chairs caused a backlog on these staircases. This meant that the evacuation process was slowed down far too much.

Because of these difficulties, staff from all the departments in the building met with staff from Central Services, (who are responsible for the maintenance of Merrion House). Together they developed an evacuation plan that met the needs of everyone who was likely to use it.

They agreed that non-disabled staff and non-disabled visitors would evacuate the building by the end staircases, and disabled members of staff and disabled visitors would use the central staircase.

They also looked at:

- the number of Evac-chairs needed in all areas where the public is likely to visit;
- identifying and training staff to help disabled people get out safely;
- reviewing the need for flashing fire alarms in areas where disabled people are likely to be on their own;
- investigating whether one of the lifts can be made into a fire-evacuation lift.

Although there are still things that need to be sorted out, these simple alterations to the plan mean that everyone can be evacuated safely. They also mean that staff helping disabled people to leave have a clear route and are not under pressure from people trying to leave from the upper floors.

For more copies of this booklet,
please download them from our website:

www.leeds.gov/equalopps

This booklet was produced by the
Equal Opportunities Unit
Leeds City Council
Civic Hall
Leeds LS1 1UR

e-mail: equalopps@leeds.gov.uk