
Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Home Evacuation Planning For People With Impairments

November is National Home Care and Hospice Month. Whether it is a client, friend, neighbor or loved one, if you are assisting someone with a disability to live at home you are providing a great service. Day to day health and quality of life issues most often top the list of concerns for home care providers. Another consideration should be preparing these individuals for an emergency evacuation. The first step in this is to assess the risk.

Risk Assessment

The Center for Fire Research at the National Institute of Standards and Technology recommends assessing the following seven risk factors before developing an evacuation plan.

- ① *The risk that the individual will resist leaving the structure.* Is the person fearful of leaving with a stranger; unwilling to leave pets, belongings, and cherished items; or exhibiting confusion or other symptoms consistent with possible mental impairments?
- ② *The individual's response to fire drills.* Does the individual currently have a plan and has that plan been practiced/tested? Is he/she willing to participate in a fire drill?
- ③ *The individual's response to instructions.* Are there language or other communication barriers?
- ④ *The individual's mobility impairments (and the resources necessary to overcome them).* Is the individual capable of reasonably safe self-rescue from a burning or damaged structure? How much can the person assist his or her rescuers? What mobility resources will need to come with the person?
- ⑤ *The need for extra help.* Help in this case refers to both equipment and or people to assist the impaired person. This may be related to the actual egress or the period immediately following. For example, a ventilator-dependent, mobility impaired person may require medical resources once outside the structure.
- ⑥ *The individual's waking response to alarms.* Will there be a difference between the daytime and nighttime fire safety needs of the individual concerned?
- ⑦ *The probability that the individual will lose consciousness in an emergency.* Is the individual dependent on specific equipment for life support? Is there adequate backup to provide for emergency situations?

The risk assessment is not based on an individual's impairment. Instead, it is based on his or her demonstrated abilities to evacuate a structure in an emergency.

The Basics

Once the assessment is completed, a basic home evacuation plan can be properly modified to fit any additional needs that were discovered. Here are other items to consider as the plan is developed.

- Smoke and Carbon Monoxide detectors should be placed appropriately around the inside of the home. Detectors with strobe lights should be considered as a means of amplifying the warning both to the building occupants and anyone observing the home from the outside.
- An exact evacuation route, to include window options, should be practiced. Evacuation of all needed equipment will have to be facilitated. If assistance from others is necessary, then 24 hour care arrangements must be made. As an extra check, neighbors should know the designated meeting place outside the home.
- If it is a multistory house, have them sleep on the ground floor. Make sure a phone is next to the bed, within arm's reach. Keep emergency telephone numbers on a list next to the phone.

Assisting others to live their lives in their own homes is a noble call. Helping them prepare for an emergency is just another way to take part in their lives, aid in their independence and keep them safe.

