

Project Safe EV-AC

Information
for
Individuals
with
Disabilities



Safe
Accessible
Free
Effective training
and materials on

EVacuation and
ACcommodation of
People with Disabilities

What is Project Safe EV-AC?

Project Safe EV-AC, a three-year development project funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), will improve evacuation from buildings, vehicles, and outdoor areas during emergencies by providing training materials on the EVacuation and ACcommodation of people with disabilities.

With your participation, materials will be Sound, Accessible, Free, and Effective. Project Safe EV-AC will benefit people with disabilities, employers, and emergency responders.

Why is EV-AC important to you?

In an emergency, people must quickly evacuate buildings, vehicles, and outdoor areas. History has shown that planning for emergency evacuation dramatically increases the chance for successful evacuation.

The problem is that many individuals, business owners, and facility managers do not have emergency evacuation plans. For people with disabilities, this failure to plan ahead and provide for accommodations can mean the difference between surviving and perishing in an emergency.

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Introduction

As employers become more aware of the need for emergency evacuation planning, many decide to develop an evacuation plan to help insure that employees can safely evacuate the work-site. However, when developing evacuation plans, employers sometimes are unaware that employees with disabilities may need accommodations during emergency evacuations. If you are a person with a disability, you may need to ask your employer to address your accommodation needs in the evacuation plan so you can safely evacuate your work-site during an emergency. This may be required under Federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or other state and local laws.

In addition, even if your employer does not have an evacuation plan for all employees, you may be entitled to accommodations for emergency evacuation. Employers with 15 or more employees are required to provide accommodations for employees with disabilities, unless such accommodations would pose an undue hardship (e.g., too costly, too extensive, too substantial, too disruptive). The obligation to provide accommodations includes all aspects of employment, including getting into and out of the work-site. In general, you are responsible for letting your employer know that you need an accommodation; employers are not required to provide accommodations if they are not aware of the need.

This publication provides ideas about how to tell your employer that you have a disability and need an accommodation for emergency evacuation, what accommodations might help you safely evacuate the work-site during an emergency, and what resources are available to provide additional information.

Disclosing Your Disability and Requesting an Accommodation

What do I tell my employer about my disability?

When disclosing information about your disability for the purpose of requesting an accommodation for emergency evacuation, you should let your employer know what limitations you have and how they interfere with your safe evacuation during an emergency. For example, your employer needs to know if you have a mobility impairment that prevents you from descending stairs, a respiratory condition that is triggered by smoke, or a hearing impairment that keeps you from hearing emergency alarms. In some cases, employers can request medical documentation to help determine effective accommodations.

Solution

An employee with paraplegia worked on the seventh floor of an office building. He could not descend steps during emergencies. An evacuation chair was provided by the employer, and a first responder team was trained to use the chair to safely evacuate him.



For more information about what medical information employers can request, visit:
<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/ramed.htm>.

Does my accommodation request have to be in writing?

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the federal agency charged with enforcing the ADA, an accommodation request does not have to be in writing. However, it might be useful to put your request in writing because it allows you to word the request the way you want, provides a record for the employer to review if needed, and documents that you made the request if there is a dispute.

Are there specific forms I should use to make my accommodation request?

The ADA does not include specific guidelines or forms for requesting reasonable accommodation. However, some employers have developed in-house forms. If so, you should use the employer's forms for requesting accommodation. Otherwise, you can use any method that is effective; the ADA does not require specific language or format. Pages 6-7 provide an example of an accommodation request letter.

Solution



An individual with mild Alzheimer's disease lived in an assisted living community. Because she easily became disoriented, she was unable to follow directions when evacuating during emergencies. The apartment complex modified its "no animal" policy to a "no pet" policy so she could have a service dog, which was trained to lead her from the apartment to a safe area.

How can I find information on accommodations for people with disabilities?

Many types of accommodation are available for individuals with motor, hearing, vision, speech, cognitive/psychiatric, and respiratory impairments.

Motor Impairments: To evacuate individuals with motor impairments, employers can purchase evacuation devices, which help move people with motor impairments down the stairs or across rough terrain. In addition, employers may want to provide heavy gloves to protect individuals' hands from debris when pushing their manual wheelchairs, a patch kit to repair flat tires, and extra batteries for those who use motorized wheelchairs or scooters. Arrangements should also be made to make wheelchairs available after evacuation. Some individuals prefer remaining in an area of rescue assistance until they receive evacuation assistance from emergency personnel.

Hearing Impairments: For individuals with hearing impairments, employers should install lighted fire strobes and other visual or vibrating alerting devices to supplement audible alarms. In addition, employers may want to provide alerting devices, vibrating paging devices, wireless communicators, or two-way paging systems to alert individuals with hearing impairments of the need to evacuate.

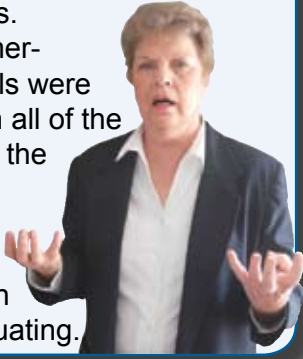
Vision Impairments: Employers should install tactile signage and maps for employees with vision impairments. Braille signage, audible directional signage, and pedestrian systems are also available. These products may benefit other people who must navigate smoke-filled exit routes.

Speech Impairments: Employers may want to provide alpha-numeric pagers or other communication devices for individuals with speech impairments so they can communicate with personnel in an emergency. Simple laminated cards with important medical and contact information can also be helpful in an emergency.

Cognitive/Psychiatric Impairments: Employers should consider ways of communicating with people who have cognitive impairments. For example, some individuals may benefit from pictures of buddies, color coding of escape doors and areas of rescue assistance, and information on tape or CD-ROM. Employers should consider the effects of training for emergency evacuation. Some individuals with psychiatric impairments benefit from frequent emergency drills, but for others practice drills may trigger anxiety. Notifying employees of upcoming practice drills and allowing them to opt out of participation may be a reasonable accommodation. In this case, another form of training for emergency evacuation procedures may be needed, for example providing detailed written instructions.

Solution

A college student who was deaf had difficulty evacuating from some of his classrooms during emergencies. Because emergency signals were not visible in all of the classrooms, the student's interpreter was trained to assist with safe evacuating.



Respiratory Impairments: Employees with respiratory impairments may have limitations exacerbated by smoke, dust, fumes, chemicals, and other odors and may benefit from products such as emergency evacuation hoods, masks, and respirators. Using areas of rescue assistance until emergency personnel arrive may also be an option. Employees with respiratory impairments may have breathing difficulties when walking distances and therefore have problems descending stairs. Employers may want to consider purchasing evacuation devices, relocating the employees' workstations, and working with employees to ensure availability of adequate medical supplies.

For more information on accommodation ideas and where to purchase equipment, visit:
<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/index.htm>.

Sample Accommodation Request Letter

The following is an example of what can be included in an accommodation request letter and is not intended to be legal advice.

Date of Letter

Your name
Your address

Employer's name
Employer's address

Dear (e.g., Supervisor, Manager, Human Resources, Personnel):

Content to consider in body of letter:

- Identify yourself as a person with a disability*
- State that you are requesting accommodations under the ADA (or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 if you are a federal employee)*
- Identify the limitations that interfere with emergency*

evacuation

- *Identify your accommodation ideas*
- *Request your employer's accommodation ideas*
- *Refer to medical documentation if attached**
- *Ask that your employer respond to your request in a reasonable amount of time*

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your printed name

Cc: to appropriate individuals

*You may want to attach medical information to your letter to help establish that you are a person with a disability and to document the need for accommodation.

How can I locate resources for advocacy and legal assistance?

Advocacy agencies have the authority to provide legal representation and other advocacy services for people with disabilities. In addition, if you need other legal assistance, several resources are available, including those that provide pro bono services or services on a contingency basis.

For information on advocacy and legal assistance resources in your area, visit: <http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/advolegal.htm>

How can I file a complaint for failure to accommodate?

Although employers are not required to have emergency evacuation plans under the ADA, if employers covered by the ADA opt to have such plans they are required to include people with disabilities. In addition, employers who do not have emergency evacuation plans may nonetheless have to address emergency evacuation for employees with disabilities as a reasonable accommodation under Title I of the ADA. Any individual who believes that his or her employment rights have been violated may file a charge of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Complaints filed by employees in the federal government must first go through an EEO Counselor.

For information related to filing a complaint against an employer, a public service, a public accommodation or service operated by a private entity, or a transportation or housing entity, visit: <http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/complaint.htm>.

Key Contacts

Project Safe EV-AC is a partnership between the International Center for Disability Information (ICDI) at West Virginia University (WVU) and subcontractor EAD & Associates, LLC. ICDI has more than 20 years experience providing disability research, resource development, and program development implementation.

Project Safe EV-AC is located in Morgantown, WV. Its partners and advisors are spread throughout the United States.

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Project Safe EV-AC

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EAD & Associates, LLC founder and Managing Director Elizabeth Davis, JD, EdM, is an internationally recognized and published expert in the fields of emergency management and special needs planning. A leader in the development and implementation of special needs policies and protocols, Ms. Davis brings more than a decade of passion, dedication, experience, and accomplishments to her work.

Project Safe EV-AC Advisory Group Members

- Administration on Aging
- American Red Cross
- Center for Disability Issues and Health Professionals
- Center for Emergency Preparedness
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Center for High Risk Outreach
- Easter Seals' "s.a.f.e.t.y. first" Project
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Fire & Life Safety for People with Disabilities
- National Organization on Disability
- U.S. Access Board
- U.S. Department of Agriculture TARGET Center
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy
- U.S. Department of Transportation

Additional Resources of Interest

Project Safe EV-AC Library

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/library/>

What accommodations should be considered for people with cognitive and psychiatric impairments?

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/index.htm#cogpsych>

What accommodations should be considered for people with hearing impairments?

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/index.htm#hearing>

What accommodations should be considered for people with vision impairments?

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/index.htm#vision>

What accommodations should be considered for people with motor impairments?

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/accomm/index.htm#motor>

What model plans are available as guidelines for community planning, living facilities, day care facilities, prisons, transportation systems, workplaces, use of assistive technology, and integration of emergency responders?

<http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/library/practicalinfo.htm>

Check Your Local Resources

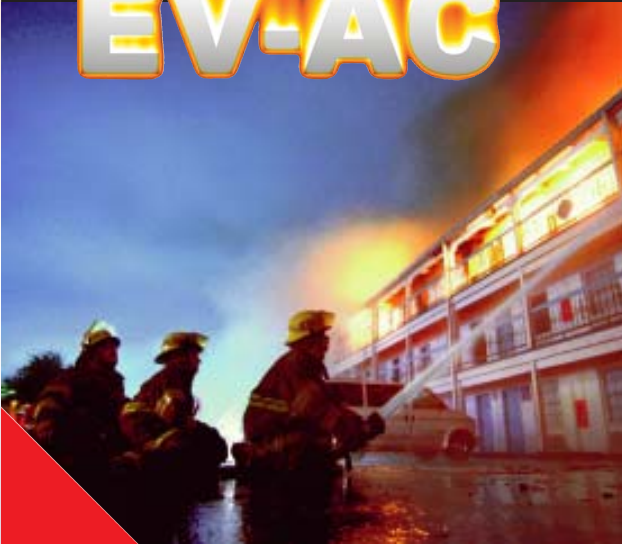
Successful emergency evacuation must involve local emergency preparedness resources. The following offices in your community can be helpful with your planning process.

- State, County, and Municipal Emergency Management Offices
- Local Emergency Planning Committees
- Departments of Public Safety
- Regional Emergency Response Teams
- State Offices of Homeland Security
- Emergency Management and Services Agencies
- Disaster Preparation Teams
- State and Local Health Officials, Healthcare Providers
- Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities
- Federal Sector Employers
- Transportation Services
- Educational Facilities
- Centers for Independent Living
- Chambers of Commerce
- State Economic Development Resources
- Local Charities and Non-Profits

For additional evacuation resources for people with disabilities, visit: <http://evac.icdi.wvu.edu/res.htm>

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