



Alternate Fire Evacuation

A Factsheet For Those Unable to Use Exit Stairs

When stairs are required for emergency exit, those persons unable to use stairs need to have a special fire emergency plan. The following fire evacuation guidelines are provided for individuals in buildings that do not have designated areas of evacuation assistance.

Non-residential High Rises

In the event that a fire alarm is activated or a fire emergency occurs, those persons unable to use exit stairs will need to find an area of refuge on the floor they are on. They should then wait in the area of refuge for assistance from arriving fire fighters.

Each floor of a building is likely to have multiple places that may serve as an area of refuge during a fire emergency. An ideal area of refuge would be an enclosed room—near an exit stairwell— that has a door, a window and a telephone. Examples would be an office, a conference room or a classroom located close to an exit stairwell. The door, when closed, provides a barrier to smoke which may be present in the building.

The window offers a second route of emergency exit once fire fighters arrive. The telephone provides a backup method of calling for assistance. It is important that fire department personnel be notified immediately upon their arrival of the location of any known occupants in the building. Fire fighters will then assist in the evacuation of these individuals.

The building's fire emergency plan should describe the procedures to be followed by those people unable to use exit stairs. It should include how to determine an area of refuge, suggest possible areas of refuge within the building, and describe the fire survival rules to be followed.

Fire evacuation behaviors should also be practiced during fire drills. An additional area that may be used for refuge is an enclosed stairwell. This is possible if there is only one individual seeking refuge and if they have two ambulatory assistants to remain with them. Once in the stairwell, with the door securely closed, they should wait for fire department help. Only if conditions deteriorate and become threatening, should the assistants carry the individual down the stairs to a safer area.

Survival Rules

Once you have reached your chosen area of refuge, observe the following survival rules:

- Keep the door to the room closed. A closed door is a barrier to smoke.
- Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter.
- Place a signal in the window. The signal can be anything that will call attention to your location.
- If smoke or fire enters your unit, call 9-1-1 to report your location. Stay low to the floor to breathe the best air. Put a wet cloth over your mouth or nose.

- It is not advisable to open or break windows. Smoke from the outside of the building can enter through open windows. Breaking windows will put you at great risk to smoke entering from the outside, and will hamper rescue efforts below.

Related Information

Client Assistance Memos

#1200 High Rise Fire Emergency Planning

#1201 Floor Wardens

#1202 High Rise Evacuation Drills

#1204 High Rise Tenant Safety

Fire Safety Teaching Guide:

#1203 High Rise Floor Wardens

For More Information

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