



# Tempe Fire Department Safety Tip

## Fire Safety

### *Plan ahead for emergencies*

If you have a disability, think about how your disability may affect your response to a fire emergency and talk it over with others. The fire department can help you plan ahead for a safe escape. Be sure to include other members of your household in your escape plan.

These suggestions are to be only that: **SUGGESTIONS**. Before attempting any of the following suggestions, we strongly encourage all viewers disabled or not to check with their Primary Care Physician. Not all disabilities are the same, some paras and quads have more flexibility than others with the same level of injury. A Newly disabled individual may not have achieved the confidence level as a person in their 3rd, 4th or greater year of living with a disability.

With all suggestions we **strongly encourage** all participants to **practice**, let your families, friends and care attendants know of these guidelines.

### *Evacuation Suggestions*

#### **Mobility Impairment**

##### Paraplegic (full upper body mobility)

Speed wheel to exit - Leaning as low as possible in the wheelchair, grab wheel rims and wheel forward steering with hands towards exit. Staying as low as possible lowers your chest and head, i.e. respiratory system from toxic fumes and smoke.

##### Paraplegic (limited upper body mobility)

If possible, attempt the Speed Wheel maneuver. You may need to practice this maneuver in your home to be timed. You will have just a few seconds to escape a smoke filled room.

##### Quadriplegic (limited hand and arm mobility)

If living independently, have an exit door to the outside with a fire-proof ramp for escape. A wooden ramp will burn if the fire is intense enough and spreads. If in a power wheelchair, lean forward if possible and aim for the door using your joy stick for maneuverability.

##### Quadriplegic (no hand or arm mobility)

If living in a residential or group home, make certain the attendants know the exit locations and have full access (cleared exits, not blocked by objects) for the residents to escape. If using a mouthpiece for controlling the joy stick, attempt to maneuver towards the door. Remember there will be smoke and fumes in the room. You will be having problems breathing. Escape

must be immediate. Do not wait to be rescued. Practice drills must be done monthly for safety for all.

**Walkers and Braces** (ability to stand for a limited time unaided)

If possible, get down on the floor and crawl while dragging your walker, canes or braces behind or beside you. If this is not possible, then crawl to the exit and if safe from smoke and flames open the door and crawl outside. Drag yourself to a safe place.

**Walkers and Braces** (no ability to stand without support)

Lower yourself to the floor and crawl dragging your assistive devices with you towards the exit. This will take a few extra seconds. Practicing the dragging and crawling method are encouraged with the guidance of family members, friends or care attendants to help guide and support your efforts.

## **Visual Impairments**

**Blind** (no vision including light or darkness)

Drop to the ground with your white cane and using the cane for direction crawl towards the exit door. Once at the door feel and smell for heat or smoke, if none is detected then open the door slowly and crawl outside until you are your full body length from the door and then get to a standing position. Using your cane get to a safe place in your yard or business and yell for assistance.

**Blind** (ability to distinguish light)

Dropping to the ground using the technique described above safely escape outside.

**Low Vision** (ability to see with Magnification aides)

You can use the same technique as for Blind Individuals.

**Night Blindness**

You will be at a slight disadvantage having night blindness. If you do not use a white cane or other mobility guidance device you must use your hands and legs to feel for obstacles in your path to the exit door. Use your other senses, smell the smoke (without inhaling it), listen for sounds, and allow the familiarity of these senses guide you to the exit door. It is a good idea to practice this technique at night in your own home without the lights on for getting comfortable with this method. Panic can and will set in immediately, familiarity with your surroundings and practice will lessen the fears.

**Tunnel Vision**

You also will be at a disadvantage. With tunnel vision, your eyes are focused on one object, you need to practice moving your line of vision around your surroundings as you are crawling towards the exit door. You don't want in your escape attempt to not realize or sense the obstacles that may be blocking your exit.

## **Hearing Impairments and Deafness**

**Deaf** (no ability to hear sounds)

Have installed in your home and business a Visual Smoke Alarm with a strobe light for warning. When the alarm strobe lights up, escape safely out of the home or business to an outside area for safety. (Remember to crawl low under the smoke). Make friends with your neighbors and alert them to the fact you are Deaf and may not be able to communicate with them without assistance. Teach them a few emergency signs, such as **help, fire, police, and ambulance.**

**Deaf** (using hearing aids and able to distinguish some sounds)

Have a Visual Smoke Alarm installed in your home and business. When the alarm strobe lights, get out immediately, remembering to crawl low under the smoke, and ask neighbors, business associates whomever to call for help.

**Hard of Hearing** (using aides and able to distinguish sounds)

If necessary for hearing loss have a Visual Smoke alarm installed in your home or business. Know where your exit doors are and when the alarm sounds or lights up escape immediately using the nearest exit door. Remember to crawl low under the smoke.

## **Mental Impairments and Cognitive Disabilities**

**Mental Disabilities**

When the smoke alarm sounds, stop what you are doing immediately. Remember where you are, which room in your home. Look for the nearest exit door that goes outside. Walk covering your mouth to the door and feel for heat or smoke. If you don't feel or see any open the door and go outside to a safe place but still on the same property and wait for the Fire Department people to arrive. If the smoke is real thick and you start coughing, get down on the floor and crawl to the door.

**Cognitive Disabilities** (Speech, Developmental, Learning)

When the smoke alarm sounds, stop what you are doing immediately. Look for the door outside. Listen for sounds and then go towards the door. If there isn't any smoke or fire, then feel the closed door for heat. If it is cold open it and go outside. Yell for help and then go sit in the yard or parking lot away from cars and wait for the Fire Department people to arrive.

**Traumatic Head or Brain Injuries**

When the smoke alarm sounds, stop what you are doing immediately. Look for the door outside and go to it now. If it is not hot and doesn't smell smoky open it and step outside and yell for help. Walk away from the house a couple of feet and wait for the Fire Department people to arrive.

**Your Assistive Devices - Do they go with you when evacuated? Of course they do.**

- Wheelchairs - If not evacuated with or in them, make certain they are removed for your safe mobility. A person using a wheelchair does not necessarily have the ability to walk without the wheelchair. To evacuate a wheelchair user and not retrieve the chair for the person will endanger the person. Some chair users must be in an upright sitting position for full chest and respiratory ability.
- Walkers, canes, and braces - these must be evacuated with the person. They are stabilizing the person and allowing them the ability to stand and move. Without these

devices they will be unable to move and could possibly fall or collapse causing further damage to their body.

- White canes - The blind individual needs this cane for guiding their walking. Without it they have problems distinguishing obstacles in their path and will possibly stumble and fall causing further injury.

### **A Special Note -**

Many disabled individuals now have the use of Working-Assistance dogs. They may be large breed dogs or a small breed. They are to be evacuated with the person also. They are part of the disabled persons mobility or life aids. These dogs are highly trained and are the attendants the disabled chose to use. Should the working-assistance dog get smoke inhalation and be unconscious they must receive respiratory care as any individual would. They do ride with the person in the ambulance, to the hospital, enter the hospital and stay with the person till the disabled person gives their emergency contact person permission to hold the dog for them. The working-assistance dogs are not to be taken from their owner. This is a federal law and all 50 states have laws for working-assistance dogs, their owners and interference with them.

## *Fire Safety Do's and Don'ts*

- Do Practice Fire Safety Drills with your family
- Do have Confidence in Your Abilities
- Do make sure your home is cleaned of possible fire starters (Old paint cans, gas cans, empty spray cans, old tires, yard debris, broken or frayed wires and cords)
- Don't Believe You Can't Help Yourself, You Can
- Don't Wait until a Fire starts before you know what to do
- Don't be afraid to ask questions about Fire Safety
- Don't be Careless with Your Safety
- Don't Use Your Disability as an Excuse Not to Know and Understand

The above information was obtained from:

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