

## So You Have the Basics? What about those with Mobility Issues?

Since we have already established that the 4 basic emergency preparedness steps are 1) Be informed, 2) Create a family emergency plan, 3) Put together an emergency supply kit and 4) Get involved in emergency preparedness, we can feel pretty good about starting off on the right foot down the road to personal emergency preparedness. But some families have a little more to consider than the basics; not just the elderly, who may have complications getting around their home which could become a death trap in an emergency, but those with access and functional needs.



Some of these needs may be for those with decreased mobility, health, sight and hearing. You can imagine that this could very well limit a person's ability to take the quick action necessary to escape during an emergency. Depending on physical limitations, many of the actions an individual can take to protect themselves from dangers may require help from a caretaker, neighbor, or outside source.

Let's use fire as an example. Those with access and functional needs such as older adults, people with limitations, and the hearing and visually impaired can significantly increase their chances of surviving a fire by practicing proven fire safety precautions.



I know it sounds repetitive, but is vitally important to make and practice escape plans. In the event of a fire, remember, time is the biggest enemy and every second counts!

- Don't assume you will be around to assist when an emergency occurs. You should always have at least three backups. Involve the assistance of a building manager, family member, neighbor or an entrusted friend when writing and practicing your fire escape plan.
- Know at least two exits from every room.
- If you use a walker or wheelchair, check all exits to make sure they get through the doorways.
- Practice opening locked or barred doors and windows. If windows and barred doors are not opened frequently, it may become difficult to open during an emergency. Remember also, the strength of someone in need may not be what it used to.
- When a fire occurs, do not waste any time saving property. Leave the home immediately. Once out, stay out.



## Develop a Home Fire Safety Plan

If you are caring for someone in your home with access and functional needs, you may need to make some room adjustments. People with mobility difficulties should be encouraged to have their bedroom on the ground floor and as close as possible to an exit.

- Unless instructed by the fire department, never use an elevator during a fire.
- Be sure your street address is clearly marked and visible from the street.
- Know which local emergency services are available and have those numbers posted or memorized. There are many forms you can use to write in your emergency numbers for your area, as well as the people you have included in your plan.



## Inform Others of Your Special Needs

Once you have your plan put together, it would be a good idea to share it with those who either live with or around the person with special needs in the event they may be called upon to help assist in an evacuation.

## Install and Maintain Smoke Alarms

People with physical limitations should be aware of special fire safety devices that are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf or hard of hearing. In addition, smoke alarms with a strobe light outside the house can catch the attention of neighbors or others who might pass by. Even though smoke alarms should be tested every month, and the battery changed at least once a year, have you ever thought that the person with special needs may not be able to reach the smoke alarm to do this? This is something you should include in your plan!

I encourage you to rethink the process of an evacuation. Don't look at it the way you would evacuate, think about those with special needs and run the plan through your head. Are the steps you would take feasible for those with special needs? As creatures of habit, we become accustomed to our own way of thinking. Expand your mind and look at emergency situations from a different point of view. You could save a life.



In closing, your plan doesn't have to be an elaborate one to be effective. What is important is that you have a plan, and that it is tailored to fit your needs. And of course, don't forget...practice, practice, practice!

**To get your copy of a Family Emergency and Communications Plan, email your request to [Elizabeth.Hall@co.kings.ca.us](mailto:Elizabeth.Hall@co.kings.ca.us).**