Fire Safety Knows No Limits!
Fire Safety for People with Disabilities

Illinois Fire Safety Alliance
Fire Safety and You

The Facts
According to study conducted by the American Community Survey in 2014, it is estimated that 56.7 million Americans in the United States have one or more disabilities in. In Illinois, it is estimated that 10.6% of the population have one or more disabilities. Those living with a disability are at a higher risk for injury or death by fire. In addition, children and people 65 and older with a disability are at an even greater risk for injury or death by fire.

*Having a disability does not limit you from taking the important steps to keep you and your family safe from fire.*
Take the Fire Safety Initiative

Because of such a high number of people in the U.S. living with one or more disabilities, it is even more important to practice good fire safety habits.

It is important for you to take the first steps to initiate good fire safety practices. Take the time to create your fire prevention plans around your family and your abilities, such as:

- **Discussing and practicing proper fire safety at home based on everyone’s needs.**
- **Planning and practicing escape plans.**
- **Installing, maintaining, and updating smoke alarms that are appropriate for you and your family.**

Knowing how to prevent a fire or injury is just as important as knowing what to do if a fire breaks out. Let’s face it, a fire could happen to anyone, anytime, and anywhere.
Smoke Alarms

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) states that, “three out of every five home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.”

What you may not know, is that even with a working smoke alarm, by the time the alarm sounds, it gives you only two minutes to escape. But don’t let that statistic fool you, two minutes makes a significant impact on life safety.

Smoke alarms can often times be frightening and confusing for some people.

Help familiarize yourself and your family with the sound and functions of the alarm, so you will be prepared if it is activated.

If you have a loved one who does not respond well to the sound of alarms, try using a voice recorded alarm to aid in the response.

Installation and Maintenance

With proper installation and maintenance, smoke alarms save lives. Smoke alarms should be installed on every floor, as well as inside and outside of every sleeping room or area.

Smoke alarms should be tested once a month. Alarms should have their batteries replaced every six months or at least once a year to keep them functioning properly. Some alarms are manufactured with ten-year lithium batteries, which can make it easier for anyone who may have difficulties changing batteries.

Smoke alarms are manufactured to be in service for a maximum of ten years. After that, they should be disposed of and replaced.
Devices and Accessories

Bed Alarm / Pillow Shaker

Often times conventional smoke alarms can be difficult for people with disabilities. If you are hard of hearing or deaf, adding smoke alarm accessories like pillow or bed shakers can make them more practical.

Audio / Visual Aid

Adding strong strobe lights or alternating multi-level pitch devices can also aid in the alarm system. For optimal safety, it is recommended to have interconnected systems that allow each device to be triggered upon the activation of one device.

Testing Accessories

Smoke alarms should be tested once a month. If it is hard to test your alarms, accessories such as remote controls, smart phone apps, or other devices are available. These devices allow smoke alarms to be tested easily by any individual.
Get Out, Stay Out

Your Role
Everyone plays a vital role in creating a fire escape plan and practicing it. Include a secondary route to escape from each room.

Organize a safe meeting place in the front of your house. Escape plans should be practiced by everyone at least twice a year. If you have a service animal, practice this plan with them as well. Remember to label any wheelchair accessible ramps or pathways for escape, so everyone knows how to exit as quickly and safely as possible. If you or a family member uses a wheelchair, designate someone to help them escape the home.

You are the master of your own disability, so make sure to talk with your family or caregiver about any needs or special instructions you may need for your escape plan.

Ask the Fire Department
Ask your local fire department to take a look at your plan, and identify any areas that could be problematic. You can also participate in a voluntary registry that allows you to give information to the department for any special concerns or important medical information they may need in case of an emergency or fire.

In Case of an Emergency
Keep hearing aids, glasses, walker, wheelchair, canes, and other important items nearby in case of an emergency. Teletypewriter and Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TTY/TDD) or a phone should also be kept close. Keep hallways and doorways clear from clutter to help with an evacuation. Sometimes taking pictures to practice the steps of the escape plan can be helpful to those with cognitive impairments. Remember to call 9-1-1 for all emergencies.
Home Fire Sprinklers

The Facts
Today’s home fires burn hotter and much quicker than ever before. Light-weight building materials, open floor plans, and the components of our furniture and belongings can intensify fire behavior within minutes. This can create an inescapable environment for high risk populations such as very young children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

Residential fire sprinklers have been proven to contain or reduce the intensity of the fire and the danger even when an individual cannot fully evacuate.

What does this mean for you and your family?
Installing residential fire sprinklers, or living within a building that has an automatic fire sprinkler system can help contain the fire and protect property. In some instances, these life safety devices can allow for safer shelter in place until the fire department arrives.

Because sprinklers control fires so rapidly, they not only allow for a safer evacuation, but help reduce damage to your home, valuables, and irreplaceable items by activating during the early stages of a fire before it spreads. Without sprinklers, a fire typically grows exponentially larger until firefighters arrive, causing more property damage and requiring a greater amount of water from firefighters’ hoses to extinguish the fire.
For More Information:
If you would like to request more information on any of topics highlighted in this booklet, please see the additional referenced material:

- Fire Safety for Older Adults
- The Benefits of Home Fire Sprinklers
- Home Fire and Burn Prevention Guide

All items can be found at www.IFSA.org