

A Resource for First Responders and Emergency Management Specific to Interaction with Individuals with Paralysis



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University of Cincinnati Center for
Excellence in Developmental Disabilities



People with disabilities are generally protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibits recipients from discriminating on the basis of disability and protects the civil rights of persons with disabilities.

Questions to Ask When Assisting People with Mobility Impairments

- Always ask the person how you can help before beginning any assistance. Even though it may be important to evacuate quickly, respect their independence to the extent possible.
- Ask if the person has limitations or problems that may affect their safety.
- Some people may only need assistance getting out of bed or out of a chair and can proceed without assistance after that.
- Ask if the person is able to stand or walk without the help of a mobility device like a cane, walker or a wheelchair
- Inform the person they might have to stand/walk for quite a while on their own. Ask if this will be ok. Remind them to be sure and tell someone if they think they need assistance.
- Ask the person if they have use of their arms.

Special Considerations:

- When carrying the person, avoid putting pressure on his or her arms, legs or chest. This may result in spasms, pain, and may even interfere with their ability to breathe.
- Avoid the “fireman’s carry.” Use the one or two person carry techniques instead.

Crutches, Canes or Other Mobility Devices

- A person using a mobility device may be able to negotiate stairs independently. One hand is used to grasp the hand-rail while the other hand is used for the crutch or cane. You should not interfere with the person's movement unless asked to do so, or the nature of the emergency is such that absolute speed is the primary concern. If this is the case, tell the person what you'll need to do and why.
- Ask if you can help by offering to carry the extra crutch.
- If the stairs are crowded, act as a buffer and run interference for the person.

Evacuating Wheelchair Users

- Wheelchair users are trained in special techniques to transfer from one chair to another. Depending on their upper body strength, they may be able to do much of the work themselves.
- Before making any assumptions about helping, or what that help should be, ask the person what help they need.



Carrying Techniques for Non-Motorized Wheelchairs

- The in-chair carry is the most desirable technique to use, if possible.
 - One-person assist
 - Grasp the pushing grips, if available.
 - Stand one step above and behind the wheelchair.
 - Tilt the wheelchair backward until a balance (fulcrum) is achieved.
 - Keep your center of gravity low.
 - Descend frontward.
 - Let the back wheels gradually lower to the next step.
 - Two-person assist
 - Position the second rescuer in front of the wheelchair and face the wheelchair.
 - Stand one, two, or three steps down (depending on the height of the other rescuer).
 - Grasp the frame of the wheelchair.
 - Push into the wheelchair.
 - Descend the stairs backwards.



Motorized Wheelchairs

- Motorized wheelchairs may weigh over 100 pounds unoccupied, and may be longer than manual wheelchairs. Lifting a motorized wheelchair and user up or down stairs requires two to four people.
- People in motorized wheelchairs probably know their equipment much better than you do. Before lifting, ask about heavy chair parts that can be temporarily detached, how you should position yourselves, where you should grab hold, and what, if any, angle to tip the chair backward.
- Turn the wheelchair's power off before lifting it.
- Most people who use motorized wheelchairs have limited arm and hand motion. Ask if they have any special requirements for being transported up or down the stairs.

People with Service Animals

Traditionally, the term “service animal” referred to seeing-eye dogs. However, today there are many other types of service animals.

- A service animal is not a pet.
- Do not touch or give the animal food or treats without the permission of the owner.
- When a dog is wearing its harness, it is on duty. In the event you are asked to take the dog while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness.
- Plan to evacuate the animal with the owner. Do not separate them!
- Service animals are not registered and there is no proof that the animal is a service animal. If the person tells you it is a service animal, treat it as such. However, if the animal is out of control or presents a threat to the individual or others, remove it from the site.
- A person is not required to give you proof of a disability that requires a service animal. You should accept the claim and treat the animal as a service animal. If you have doubts, wait until you arrive at your destination and address the issue with the supervisor in charge.
- The animal need not be specially trained as a service animal. People with psychiatric and emotional disabilities may have a companion animal. These are just as important to them as a service animal is to a person with a physical disability – please be understanding and treat the animal as a service animal.
- A service animal must be in a harness or on a leash, but need not be muzzled.

Resources

Tips for First Responders – People with Service Animals

unmhealth.org/services/development-disabilities/programs/_media/fifth-edition-tips-sheet.pdf

Preserving Our Freedom: Ending Institutionalization of People with Disabilities During and After Disasters: ncd.gov/publications/2019/preserving-our-freedom

Defining Functional Needs — Updating CMIST By June Isaacson, Kailes Disability Policy

Consultant: www.disasterstrategies.org/index.php/blog/june-isaacson-kailes/defining-functional-needs-updating-cmist-june-isaacson-kailes-disability-policy-consultant

Adaptive Equipment Demonstrations for First Responders

pcil.org/feature/emergency-preparedness/

- The Adaptive Equipment Demonstrations (AED) are for Police, First Responders, EMS, and firefighters to help train them of the various adaptive equipment they may come across in emergency situations:
 - Adaptive Equipment Education: pcil.org/progressive-centers-adaptive-equipment-education/
 - Adaptive Equipment Video 2012: pcil.org/?page_id=413
 - Emergency Preparedness Part 1: pcil.org/?page_id=418
 - Proper Lifting Techniques: pcil.org/?page_id=423
 - Ask About the Chair: pcil.org/?page_id=426
 - Proper Loading Techniques on a Transit Bus: pcil.org/?page_id=429

Guidance for Integrating People with Disabilities in Emergency Drills and Exercises:

www.jjk.com/pubs/Guidance-Drills-Exercises.pdf



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