



# Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Supplementary Guide: Means of Escape for Disabled People.

## A Review

First published in 2007 by the  
Department for Communities and  
Local Government





## **Introduction**

This review has been undertaken by Access and Evac-u-8 Ltd., one of the most experienced companies working in the field of access and evacuation for disabled people in the UK.

The review comes at a time when the country is bracing itself against an imminent terrorist attack the nature of emergency evacuation in the United Kingdom is changing.

Disabled people are more visible in the community today, the need for service providers to develop evacuation plan for disabled people has increased in importance.

Disabled people, like everyone else, are frightened and reading stories of disabled people being abandoned for 25 minutes during an emergency evacuation in a well know department store does not help. The same store was evacuated 4 months later when an employee mistook a ticking security tag for a bomb.

There was also the shopping centre in Cheshire that temporarily banned people with mobility problems because, in their view, they may be unable to escape in an emergency.

These stories are not uncommon and are widely reported in the local and national media as well as the social networks.

The evacuation of disabled people was broadly omitted from The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 with attention being focused on getting disabled people into premises, when, of course, if disabled people are to fully use the building, there is also an obligation to enable them to leave safely.

**“The safe evacuation of disabled people is a problematic area for policy makers and one that has not received sufficient attention to date”.**

This statement appears in Management Practice page 4 paragraph 3 it would seem that this statement is as equally as true in 2016 as it was when the supplementary guide was first published in 2007.

To view Means of Escape for Disabled People use link.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/422202/9446\\_Means\\_of\\_Escape\\_v2\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422202/9446_Means_of_Escape_v2_.pdf)

## The legal process

The local Fire and Rescue Authorities can visit premises to check whether the fire risk assessment and fire prevention measures are appropriate.

They can also take action if they think your fire safety measures aren't adequate. For example, they might issue an informal notice suggesting safety measures.

The next stage could also give a formal fire safety notice. They can work with service providers to fix the problems described in the notice.

If the premises have high safety risks or will have high safety risks if the change of use of the premises goes ahead then they can place an alterations notice on the premises.

An enforcement notice can be placed on the premises if the fire and rescue authority finds a serious risk that's not being managed. It will say what improvements are needed and by when. These take effect immediately if the fire and rescue authority thinks the fire risk is so great that access to your premises needs to be prohibited or restricted.

Minor infringements can lead to a fine of up to £5,000. Major penalties can have unlimited fines and up to 2 years in prison imposed.

However, is the threat of prosecution, damage to reputation through the mainstream media and social media and potential person injury claims with increased insurance not to mention the associated down time with the accident investigation and legal fees in defending a claim a risk worth taking?

Ultimately the responsible person and directors could be issued with a large fine or ultimately a jail sentence.

### Supplementary guide

#### Introduction

Means of Escape for Disabled People is a supplementary guide that was first published in 2007 by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Under current fire safety legislation, it is the responsibility of the person(s) having responsibility for the building to provide a fire safety risk assessment that includes an emergency evacuation plan for all people likely to be in the premises, including disabled people, and how that plan will be implemented.

Such an evacuation plan should not rely upon the intervention of the Fire and Rescue Service to make it work. In fact a service provider could be prosecuted if the evacuation plans is found to be inadequate after an emergency.

### Review

The publication was used to inform service providers of their responsibilities under current fire safety legislation, and to introduce service providers to the concept of ensuring the safe evacuation disabled people from their premises.

The transference of responsibility for evacuation of disabled people from the Fire and Rescue Services to the Service Providers seems to have had little impact.

It would appear that service providers are confused about their responsibilities and opted for leaving disabled people in a stairwell or refuges and expecting the fire and rescue services to take the responsibility for their evacuation.

Countless media stories covering the lack of evacuation afford to disabled people over the period backs this up.

### Conclusions

Smart phone technology was in its infancy when Means of Escape for Disabled People was published; few people had access to a smart phone. In the intervening period technology has come a long way, a smart mobile phone is an integral tool for millions of disabled people with it being incorporated into their daily lives.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 1.2: Management practice**

The safe evacuation of disabled people is a problematic area for policy makers and one that has not received sufficient attention to date.

It is important that both building managers and disabled people understand that planning for means of escape is about planning for exceptional circumstances (i.e. not an everyday event). When writing escape plans that include disabled people, there is sometimes a tendency to overplay the safety issue to the detriment of the independence and dignity of disabled people.

Escape plans for disabled people should be prepared with the view that what is required is for 'the real thing'. The level of effort required of a disabled person may not be acceptable for a practice or false alarm or in everyday activities. The procedures put in place should take account of this and allow for simulation in the case of fire drills or other emergency evacuation practices.

## Conclusions

Today tablets and smart mobile phones can take and manipulate photographs, which can be used as part of a way finding tool. This can be particularly useful for disabled people as they can follow the pictogram of the fire evacuation route on their phones. Technology will not only help service providers but also can give the Fire and Rescue services the opportunity to review the plans that are being produced by service providers via the Internet. If they are unhappy with the quality of the plans they can advise the service provider.

## Review

The statement opposite is just as accurate in 2016 as it was in 2007. Service providers are not complying with the Fire Safety Order and the Regulatory Reform Order 2005 and it is not being enforced rigorously enough.

This coupled with the reduction in funding available to the Fire and Rescue Services during the period means that inspection of the plans has had to reduce relying now on prosecution rather than advice.

By watching evacuation techniques training being undertaken by staff, who have volunteered to assist in an emergency, means that disabled staff can be confident in the evacuation techniques and staff.

The evacuation of disabled people doesn't need to be problematic for service providers, technology can be used to provide personal emergency evacuation plans.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 1.4: Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for employees and regular visitors**

Where staff and regular visitors to a building require a plan, they can be provided with an individual plan through the human resources department or building manager. The plan must be tailored to their individual needs and is likely to give detailed information on their movements during an escape. It is also possible that there will be some building adaptation to facilitate their escape and to reduce the need for personal assistance.

## Review

Where an employer or a service provider does not make provision for the safe evacuation of disabled people from its premises, this may be viewed as discrimination.

It may also constitute a failure to comply with the requirements of the Fire Safety Legislation.

Service providers need to be aware that it doesn't have to be financially onerous to provide an evacuation plan for a disabled employee or regular visitor.

Disabled people require information informing them of whom they can contact if they are refused an evacuation plan.

## Conclusions

Smart mobile phones have many features which can help a disabled person during an emergency, such as a torch light to illuminate a corridor for visually impaired people, the accessibility controls on the mobile phone allow disabled people to set functions on their phone to meet their needs. Information can be accessed, via the Internet, to help create an evacuation strategy.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 1.5: Standard plans for occasional visitors**

A standard plan is used where there are visitors or casual users of the building who may be present infrequently or on only one occasion. The provision of standard PEEPs takes account of the following:

- the disabled person's movements within the building;
- the operational procedures within the building;
- the types of escape that can be made available;
- the building systems, e.g. the fire alarm; and
- the existing egress plan.

## Review

Service providers are not advertising or informing disabled people that they can request a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) when accessing their services.

The guide provides advice on a wide range of options for ensuring the safe evacuation of disabled people, none of which suggest leaving disabled individuals in a stairwell or refuges for the Fire and Rescue Service to evacuate them.

It would be impossible to provide a tailored evacuation plan for an individual if the service provider has not developed a procedure to identify what their needs will be during an emergency.

If service providers have a range of standard evacuation plan which can be used as options for the evacuation of disabled people to choose from. The Fire and Rescue Service then could evaluate the quality of their plans and make sure that they are of a significant standard.

If the standard was not acceptable the Fire and Rescue Service could make recommendations for improvements.

## Conclusions

There are a number of ways a smart phone can receive information Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, email or text. Any of which can be used to reduce unnecessary evacuation. Using technology that is available today, service providers can provide an evacuation plan regardless of how often a disabled person access their service.

## **Supplementary guide**

It is understood by most people that when a fire alarm is activated they must all leave the building by the nearest exit, as quickly as possible, and reach a place of ultimate safety.

This responsibility also applies to disabled people, therefore disabled people can be expected to identify themselves when they are informed of the availability of a choice of evacuation plan and co-operate by giving any information necessary for the safe execution of the plan.

## **Review**

If the disabled staff members are not involved in the process of developing evacuation procedures, then they won't have confidence that their evacuation needs will be met and that they will be evacuated in an emergency.

Disabled people have been refused access to a service when they tried to request an evacuation plan for their needs in an emergency, on the grounds of health and safety. This could be viewed as discriminatory if it is proved to be unreasonable.

In a large proportion of cases disabled people will be able to evacuate the building themselves or with some assistance, which can easily be achieved.

## **Conclusions**

By using technology service providers can have information on how many disabled people use their services regularly. This information can be useful in accessing the suitability of their evacuation processes. Disabled people use technology every day which can be used to provide their evacuation plan, technology has the benefit of only having to provide their information once to the service provider then they notify the service provider when they intend to use their services which will activate their evacuation plan if there is an emergency.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 1.6: Unknown or uncontrolled visitors**

Where there are people within the building who do not pass a reception point or are not controlled, such as in a shopping centre, library or theatre it is more difficult to gather information prior to the need to escape. In these instances, a system of standard PEEPs should also be implemented and advertised.

Training for staff is vital in this case as they will have to provide assistance and advice to disabled users of the building as the incident develops. The plans to enable them to leave safely in the event of an incident will require pre-planning.

## Conclusions

QR -codes is a way of providing information to a disabled person attending a service. QR- codes could be added to the service provider's stationery for the disabled person to download onto their mobile phone. This could be the route to where their meeting is taking place and give them the evacuation route out of the building in an emergency.

## Review

The lack of provision for the evacuation of disabled people is highlighted even more when dealing with multi-access points to a building, it may mean that there are more disabled people using the services than the provider is aware of.

If there is no provision in place to know how many disabled people are accessing their services, then how can they provide adequate evacuation plans for disabled people?

It is not just a fire emergency that can trigger the evacuation of a building. There is also the threat of terrorist attack and for this reason it is not acceptable that disabled people are left in a stairwell or a refuge.

Having a process which informs the service provider of how many disabled people are in their building and what their evacuation needs are, will help to give both parties confidence in the evacuation policy.

Evacuation techniques which relies on specialised equipment to be undertaken by voluntary staff to assist in the evacuation process should only be used as a last resort.

## **Supplementary guide**

The general population will follow the escape routes or make their way out by the way they came in, but disabled people who require their escape to be facilitated will need to be considered in more depth in the general plan

Disabled people will need to have more information about the options available to them. In some instances, they will need to be allocated people to assist their escape; however, the aim should be to facilitate disabled people's independent escape as far as possible

## **Review**

If service providers are willing to provide a PEEP for disabled people and involve them in the creation of their personal emergency evacuation plan, would increase the confidence of those disabled individuals that their evacuation needs were being taken into account.

Many disabled people can and would be willing to facilitate their own escape in an emergency.

Service providers need to have confidence when a disabled person states that they will facilitate their own escape and accept that decision.

Using technology, service providers can keep disabled people informed of any changes which they need to be notified of when accessing a service.

## **Conclusions**

App's have been developed and can be downloaded on to disabled people's smart phones to direct disabled individuals to, around and out of a building in an emergency.

## Supplementary guide

Where standard PEEPs are used and disabled visitors are not available to consult with in person when setting up the system, it is appropriate to consult local disabled people's organisations.

Staff have a vital role in communicating the evacuation plan to disabled visitors, and to fulfil this role effectively they will be required to undergo disability escape etiquette training. This consultation and planning process should be introduced on induction and be reviewed regularly as appropriate.

### **Section 2.2.3: Residents**

Where sleeping accommodation is provided, e.g. in a hotel, part of the booking-in procedure should include the offer of a suitable escape plan. Additional accessible information is required in each room, adjacent to the evacuation procedures for all residents.

In hostel accommodation or student dwellings, etc. suitable PEEPs should be provided by the accommodation manager based on the standard set of plans for the building.

## Conclusions

The use of a smart phone interface into a service provider's evacuation process, means that communication with the disabled individual can be continually monitored, either verbally, written, via a text, push notification or email.

## Review

It is important that when developing an emergency evacuation procedure for disabled people, the process take advantage of all the relevant information to create a robust policy this should include:

- The configuration of the building.
- Any evacuation equipment.
- Disabled people's views.
- Staff willingness and availability to provide continuing support for the policy after training has been provided.
- Fire Safety Legislation.

The service provider's ability to provide an evacuation plans, due to the reduction in staff availability or because an evacuation route is unusable needs to be taken into account. In these situations the use of technology can assist in the creation of alternative evacuation processes.

For example; Students tend to listen to music through headphones these can prevent them from hearing a fire alarm. An alert to a mobile phone, however, will be picked up.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 2.2.4: Students/pupils**

When a child or student is enrolled, their escape plan should be developed as part of the admissions process. Care should be taken that all disabled children or students are provided with a plan if they need one, even if they are provided with a statement or not.

### **Section 2.2.5: Visitors – individual**

Individual visitors to a building may fall into two groups: those who are invited to a building, such as sales representatives; and casual visitors who attend of their own volition, such as clients attending to discuss issues with members of staff.

A system of standard plans should be created. For invited visitors, the plans could be put in place prior to the meeting, or they could be presented to casual visitors when they book in at reception.

## Review

There may be a number of reasons why a service provider is unwilling to provide an evacuation policy.

- The cost for the development of the system.
- The on-going cost of training the staff
- The perceived cost for any identified evacuation equipment.
- Lack of communication with disabled people.
- The length of time it may take to provide a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan.

Using technology would allow for the provision of evacuation plans for disabled people to be allocated instantaneously.

## Conclusions

Videos of the evacuation process and the correct use of equipment the service provider has installed in their building can be viewed by disabled people to ensure that it is suitable for their evacuation needs.

## **Supplementary guide**

### **Section 2.3.6: Training and recruitment of volunteers**

In some instances, it may be necessary to recruit and train additional staff to provide assistance during an escape. In considering staff who may provide assistance in an evacuation, it is important to take account of their work time availability, location in a building or on a site, and whether they are employees of another company providing an outsourced facility. Another consideration in utilising outsourced employees is the need to ensure that their managers are fully in agreement with their involvement in an emergency plan and that the person concerned is fully conversant with the work culture and policies of the workplace or site.

### **Section 2.3.7: Functions and conferences**

Function/conference organisers will be responsible for ensuring that disabled people attending conferences or meetings within the building and are provided with a suitable plan. It is important that conference fliers booking forms inform delegates about the building systems. Escape instructions displayed in each room should be made available in other accessible formats.

## **Conclusions**

On line training could be provided to staff at any time and they can revisit this training at anytime and anywhere.

## **Review**

A key element in providing a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan to an individual is to involve their care or support worker, if they have one with them, when accessing services.

Care or support workers will have a responsibility for the disabled individual and should be expected to participate in the evacuation.

Part of an evacuation process for disabled people, particularly if the service provider is expecting a larger number of disabled people to attend, would be to know the amount of available evacuation equipment, its position and if it is available to move should it be required.

Training could be provided to care or support workers on evacuation techniques so they could assist in the evacuation of the disabled individual they are accompanying.

Disabled people would have more confidence in a person they know has a personal interest in their well-being.

## Supplementary guide

### **Section 3: The process**

#### **Section 3.1: Interviewing staff**

Once the person responsible for their plan has contacted the disabled person, an interview should be organised to establish suitable evacuation procedures.

A suitable plan should be negotiated, taking into consideration what the building, management and disabled person can offer. It should not be automatically assumed that a disabled person cannot leave the building independently. It is recommended that disabled people are consulted about their evacuation plan. They should be given information about the building systems and their opinions and experience should be both sought and respected.

The training provided should include disability awareness, disability evacuation etiquette, and moving, lifting and handling techniques.

## Conclusions

Technology can allow disabled people to familiarise themselves with the service providers premises prior to attending.

## Review

Disabled people should be willing to be part of a process that affords them an evacuation plan in the event of an emergency.

The process for developing an individual's evacuation plan should not cause any delay in the disabled individual being able to attend the service providers facility.

Disabled people should not be denied access to a service on the grounds that the service provider can't provide an evacuation plan for them.

The Fire and Rescue Service should work with the service provider to ensure that the service provider is doing all they can to develop a process for the evacuation of disabled people.

By giving disabled people access to evacuation techniques training would enable them to develop a technique, which could suit their needs.

Disabled people could use their familiarity with the techniques that they are happy with to use in an emergency to evacuate them. The disabled individual could show people who have volunteered to in an emergency.

## **Supplementary guide**

### **Section 4.6.3: Fire instructions**

It should also be recognised that many hearing impaired and deaf people do not have English as a first language. It is important that a Plain English translation of the fire protocol is provided. It may also be an advantage to this group of people for pictograms to be provided to support the written information. Deaf people may prefer to have instructions explained to them through a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

### **Section 4.8.2: Fire instructions**

Visitors should always be offered an escape plan, but staff should not be concerned if a person who has an apparent disability does not accept one. It is possible that the person is confident that they can make their own escape.

Generic plans should be provided in a discreet manner. This will encourage people who have conditions such as asthma, heart disease, epilepsy or emotional problems to ask for assistance, if they wish to do so.

## **Review**

The UK has become more accessible and disabled people are taking advantage of a greater accessible environment, there is also a rise in disabled tourists.

It has become clear that the purchase of evacuation equipment to some service providers has become a placebo. The equipment is bought and displayed without anyone being trained to use it. It is not serviced and if it is broken this only comes to light in a real emergency.

Technology can help with communication between disabled people and the service provider. Information and instructions can be sent in a format that disabled people understand and act on.

Care or support workers can assist with this communication between the disabled person and a service provider. It is important, therefore, that they and the disabled individual are part of the process for developing their Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan.

## **Conclusions**

By using technology service providers can offer evacuation plans to disabled tourist in their own language helping to make them safer. Technology can be used to provide evacuation plans in a discreet manner. The disabled individual would not have to attend any meetings to discuss their evacuation needs as it could all be done via the disabled individual's mobile smart phone.

## Supplementary guide

Fire-fighting lifts may be used in the early stage of the evacuation process in agreement with the local Fire and Rescue Service.

In buildings where horizontal escape is used prior to exit in an ordinary lift, the instructions for horizontal escape should be followed first.

### **Section 2: Meet assistance at a refuge**

Some disabled people will require assisted escape. In these cases, it will be necessary to have a pre-arranged meeting place. If the disabled person is likely to move around the building, a means of communication will be necessary between the escape volunteer and the disabled person. They can then arrange to meet at a particular refuge point during the escape.

People should never be left in a refuge point to wait for the Fire and Rescue Service. The refuge can be used as a safe resting place as well as a place to wait in a phased evacuation while the go-ahead for a full escape is established. A refuge may be equipped with a suitable means of communication.

## Conclusions

Technology is very affordable and disabled people are confident in incorporating it in to their lives, which make them safer and more independent.

## Review

Disabled people need to be confident that there was more than the option to leave them in a stairwell or refuge waiting for the Fire and Rescue Service, who may or may not attend, to evacuate them.

Disabled people equally need to cooperate if service providers are to involve them in the process of developing evacuation plans.

In order to get disabled people more involved in this cooperation with service providers, disabled people need to be aware that if service providers are not providing a suitable evacuation process for disabled people then they will have an enforcement notice served. They will have to address this issue, particularly if they leave disabled people in stairwell's or refuges for the Fire and Rescue Services to evacuate to the place of safety as part of the plan.

This is brought into sharp focus as the country is braced for a terrorist attack, it is no longer satisfactory to leave people in a stairwell or refuge to act as potential human shields.

## Supplementary guide

### **2. Evacuation chairs**

Where this is the preferred method of escape, the responsible person will provide an evacuation chair. It will be allocated to a particular person and either kept alongside their desk or in the most suitable refuge close to them.

### **15. Orientation information**

Where a person requires additional orientation information, it may be sufficient to give them a guided tour of the escape routes from the rooms they use. There are a number of disabilities where additional orientation information is required. Good orientation systems benefit all of them and could include colour coding, signage and defined routes. People with cognitive impairments can benefit from a photographic record of the route.

### **26. Alternative alarm systems**

There are other methods of contacting disabled people; these can be either through the telephone system or through the intranet. It is recommended that where a person cannot use the existing system or needs support to use it, all other communication options are explored.

## Conclusions

As technology progress the easier it will be to evacuate disabled people and keep them informed of the incident as it develops.

## Review

Identifying the most accessible evacuation route suitable for disabled people is very important, particularly, if we want disabled people to facilitate their own evacuation. Escape routes are not generally used unless there is an emergency so it is advisable to provide information on the evacuation routes to disabled people.

Information on evacuation equipment that the service provider has purchased to assist in the evacuation of disabled people needs to be shared with disabled people so that they can ensure that they could use the equipment

There are large quantities of evacuation equipment designed to assist in the evacuation of disabled people available. Service providers should not purchase any equipment without involving disabled members of staff or people who are likely to require it as to whether they would be willing to use it.

Service providers should discuss any planned purchase of evacuation equipment with disabled people to make sure as many disabled people as possible can use the equipment.

Care or support worker should be trained on the use of any evacuation equipment provided for the disabled person they are accompanying.