



Guidelines for Assisting Persons with Disabilities in Emergency Evacuation

*The content of this document is for informational purposes only.
It is not intended for medical or legal advice.*

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Assisting Persons with Disabilities in an Evacuation

General Guidelines

- Assign office, class, and event locations, if possible, in most accessible locations.
- Ensure egress routes and areas of refuge are always clear and properly marked.
- Participate in and help identify gaps in evacuation plans during practice drills.
- Respect that the person with the disability may be the best authority on how to be evacuated.
- Provide adequate notice that a potential danger exists and that evacuation should begin.
- Offer assistance but let the person explain what help is needed.
- Carrying a person is not advisable except in the most extreme of circumstances.
- Be aware that a service animal's sense of direction may become confused during an emergency.
- Do not abandon the person after exiting a building. Lead to a safe place with others.

The following are some specific suggestions that may provide additional assistance for specific disabilities.

Assisting Persons who Use Wheelchairs

- Be familiar with designated areas of refuge and location of evacuation equipment for wheelchair users.
- If the person is unable to speak clearly, look for a sign on the chair with printed instructions.
- Only in situations of extreme danger should untrained people attempt to carry a person in a wheelchair.
- Prior to moving the person, check for life-support equipment.
- Be aware that wheelchairs have parts not designed to handle the stress of lifting.
- If you and/or others cannot safely carry a person up/down stairs, don't. Instead
 - Position the person in the safest place possible according to the emergency.
 - Alert emergency personnel of person's location.

Assisting Persons with Mobility Limitations - Non Wheelchair Users

- Do not interfere with person's movement.
- Clear displaced and fallen obstacles from egress routes.
- If the stairs are crowded, you may act as a buffer.

Assisting Persons with Limited Communication

- Look for an instruction card on the person.
- During an evacuation, give clear instructions.
- Maintain eye contact with the individual to insure all directions are heard and understood.

Assisting Deaf or Hard of Hearing Persons

- Provide the person with a flashlight from their preparedness kit so they can signal their location and to help with lip reading in the dark.
- Get attention of the person before speaking, and look at them when speaking.
- Use facial expressions and hand gestures to communicate.
- Speak using short sentences.
- Use written notes to indicate emergency and instructions, for example, "Fire! Go out rear door now!"
- Check to be sure you are understood.
- Be patient, the person may have difficulty understanding the urgency of your message.
- Be aware that the person may not be able to hear oral commands issued by authorities.
- When out of danger, offer to make phone calls if a TTY is not available.

Assisting Persons who are Blind or have Low Vision

- In the planning phase,
 - Offer emergency information in an accessible format.
 - Provide orientation to building evacuation routes and pull alarm locations.
- During an emergency, announce your presence when entering the person's area.
- Offer your elbow; do not grab their arm or hand.
- Communicate through the evacuation by describing in advance physical barriers or action to be taken such as, "Take two steps down."

Assisting Persons with Psychological Disabilities

- Make sure exits and safe areas are clearly marked prior to an emergency.
- Understand that the person may have difficulties in concentrating, handling stress, and initiating personal contact.
- Help reduce stress during an emergency by
 - Offering to escort the person through the evacuation.
 - Giving clear and simple instructions.

Assisting Persons with Learning Disabilities

- During the planning phase,
 - Offer to provide information in alternative formats.
 - Provide adequate signage with simple symbols and review with them for understanding.
- When developing printed emergency materials, review to insure easy "readability."
- During an evacuation, be patient, giving instructions slowly and clearly.
- Offer to accompany them as their sense of direction may be limited.
- Encourage the person to practice their evacuation route(s) regularly.

Assisting Persons who are Developmentally Disabled

- Be aware that they may be unable to understand the emergency and could become disoriented or confused about the proper way to react.
- During an evacuation, give instructions slowly and clearly.
- Prior to an emergency, make sure designated emergency routes are marked with signage that communicates with color and symbols rather than words.
- Encourage the person to practice their evacuation route(s) regularly.

Assisting Persons with Medical Conditions

- Medical conditions include, for example, pregnancy, respiratory or cardiac problems.
- Offer assistance walking down stairs.
- Find ways to reduce stress, exertion, and exposure to dust or smoke.
- Remind person to bring medication or inhalers.
- Allow rest periods during evacuation if possible.

Assisting Owners of Service Animals

- Do not pet or offer food or water without the permission of the owner.
- Plan for the service animal to be evacuated with the owner.
- In the event that you are asked to handle the service animal while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness if present.

ASSISTING A PERSON IN A WHEELCHAIR

BUMPING ON A SERIES OF STEPS

In situations where the wheelchair user must be carried up or down a flight of steps, it is necessary to have a minimum of two persons assisting. Four persons may be needed in the case of a heavy adult. The strongest person(s) should be placed at the back of the chair. If an assisting person has a medical condition that prohibits lifting, it is advisable to enlist the assistance of a different volunteer.

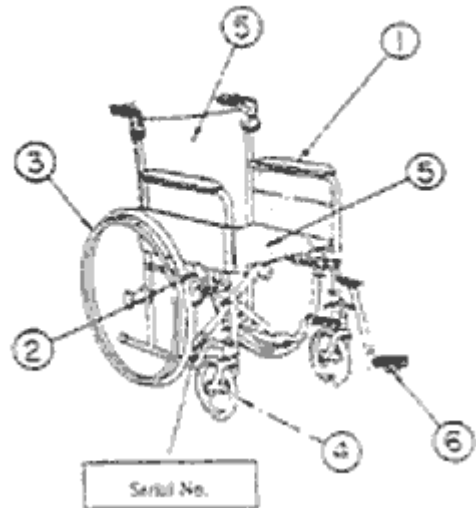
PROCEDURE:

1. The wheelchair should be gripped by the handles on the back of the chair. If two people are assisting, one person holds the hand grips; the other person assists in front. If there are four people, at least two people should assist in the back; each person gripping one of the handles. Hand placement for those people who are assisting in the front depends upon which parts of the wheelchair are removable. This will need to be determined at that time of evacuation. Be advised of the following: if the wheelchair arms are removable, do NOT grip them. This must be stressed because it is the first place an assisting person will be inclined to grip. If the leg rests are removable, do NOT grip them. The persons who are assisting in the front of the wheelchair should grip a part of the wheelchair that is non removable, such as the front seat frame or leg rest (if non removable).
2. AVOID carrying the wheelchair up or downstairs. This can quickly cause back trouble for those who are trying to be of assistance. Instead, ROLL the wheelchair up or down the stairs. Allow the wheelchair to bear its own weight.

3. Keep the wheelchair slightly tilted back to keep the wheelchair user secure; however, do not tilt too far; this may cause the person who is assisting behind the wheelchair to bend too far forward and could cause the person(s) to lose balance and pitch forward.
4. In general, it is always best to keep the wheelchair user facing away from the stairs unless advised otherwise by the wheelchair user.

WHEELCHAIR NOMENCLATURE

1. Armrests
2. Wheel Locks
3. Wheel and Handrim
4. Casters
5. Seat/Back Upholstery
6. Footplates



The following represents the varying weights, lengths, and widths of wheelchairs, both electric and manual, with a person in it. The American National Standards Institute

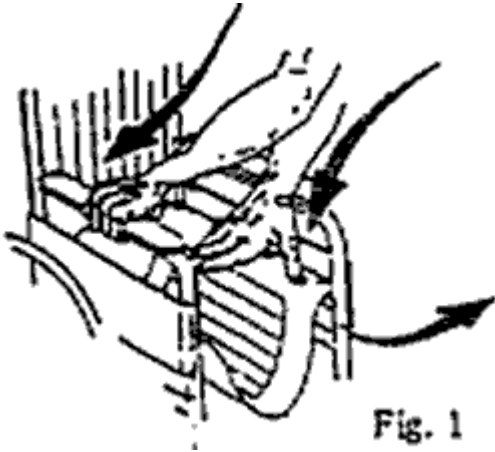
Weight	Length	Width
200 Pounds	48 inches	25 inches
360 Pounds	50 inches	26 inches
375 Pounds	63 inches	63 inches

states that doorway widths should be 32 inches.

GENERAL OPERATIONAL GUIDE

HOW TO OPEN/FOLD WHEELCHAIRS:

TO OPEN CHAIR: Tilt chair to one side, push down on seat rails (fig 1).



TO FOLD CHAIR: Fold up the footplates, tilt chair to one side, lift upward on seat rail or on upholstery next to seat rail. For chairs with detachable or offset arms (fig.2), fold by lifting carrying straps.

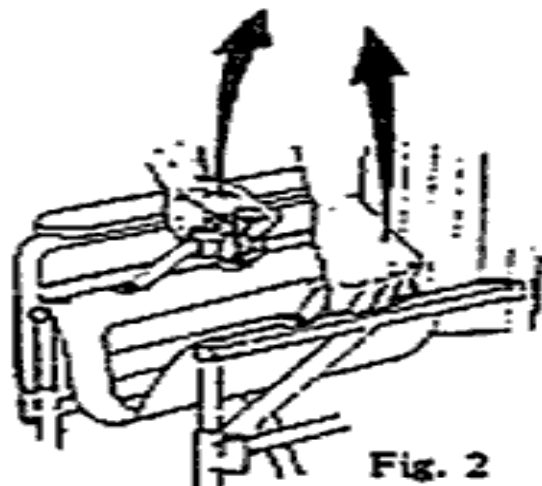


Figure 3. When folding the wheelchair be sure the foot plates are all the way up against the leg frames.



CURBS AND SINGLE STEPS:

There are generally two methods which can be used to assist a person in a wheelchair over a curb or single step. The wheelchair can be rolled down off the curb or the step, backwards or forwards. The method used depends upon the preference of the user, the environmental situation, the strength of the assisting person, and the confidence the wheelchair user has in the assistant. As in all activities, if the wheelchair user does not have sitting balance, a seat belt should be attached to the wheelchair and used.



A. BACKWARD:

The least taxing method on the assisting person and usually the safest for the wheelchair user is to turn the wheelchair around until it can be rolled off the step or curb backwards.

Figure 4. When the wheelchair is being rolled backwards off a curb, support it by lightly pressing against it.

PROCEDURE:

1. Just before reaching the edge of the curb or step turn the wheelchair around so that it is facing away from the edge.
2. Holding tightly to the handles, back the wheelchair down off the curb. Let the rear wheels roll down over the edge. Additional support can be furnished by pressing a hip against the back of the chair as it comes off of the edge. (See figure 4.)
3. To prevent the front wheels coming down with a jar that could throw the wheelchair user out of the chair, press a foot on the anti-tipping bar as the chair is backed away from the curb. Then gently lower the front wheels to the ground.
4. Turn the wheelchair around, being careful not to clip the ankle of a passer-by and proceed on your way.

B. FORWARD:

This method is effective if the assisting person is experienced in handling wheelchairs. It is most useful on crowded street corners and places where the wheelchair can not be turned around to go off an edge backwards. The wheelchair user should have on a safety belt or be holding to the chair to prevent being thrown forward out of the wheelchair.

PROCEDURE:

1. As the curb is approached, place one foot on the anti-tipping bar and tip the wheelchair back on the large wheels. This keeps the wheelchair user securely in the chair as the chair rolls off the edge. The assisting person should not be supporting the weight of the wheelchair user, but just keep the wheelchair balanced on the large wheels.
2. Once the front wheels are up, remove the foot from the anti-tipping bar. Continue rolling the wheelchair off the edge with the front wheels up.
3. After the large wheels are off the edge, allow the front wheels to drop down gently by pressing a foot on the anti-tipping bar as the wheels come down.

ROLLING ON THE REAR WHEELS:

Can be used to roll the wheelchair over the following types of terrain: going over railroad tracks and grates embedded in the street or sidewalks; soft lawns, sand, snow, etc., even deep-pile carpets. These types of terrain tend to throw the front wheels aside or cause them to sink in, making the progress difficult if not impossible. Lifting the front wheels of the surface gives the assisting person more control over the wheelchair.

If the assisting person is not strong enough (although it actually takes little physical strength if the wheelchair is kept balanced) or doesn't feel confident, it is advisable to turn the wheelchair around and go backwards over rough terrain. This also puts the front wheels out of the way as they are following rather than guiding the wheelchair. Remember not to tilt the chair too far backwards.

Methods of assistance



Two handed chair carry



Packstrap carry



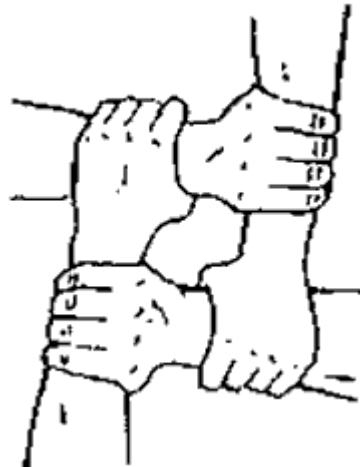
Walking assist



Chair carry



Carry by extremities



Packsaddle

Each bearer grasps one of his wrists and one of the other bearer's wrists, thus forming a packsaddle.