

S A F E T Y N O T E S

August 2013

FIRE ESCAPE PLANNING FOR ALL

Depending on the source and definition, the percentage of persons considered to have a disability in the U.S. varies between 15% and 50%. The percentage has increased as emergency planners have recognized the variety of special or specific needs that can impact the effectiveness of emergency response on the part of individuals as well as traditional first responders such as fire or police personnel.

On a large scale, we only need remember persons left out or left behind in recent hurricanes and wildfires. On an everyday basis, we should look at residential fire loss. In short, the day-by-day loss of life through residential fire exceeds the number of fatalities in all of the natural disasters typically suffered by citizens each year in our country.

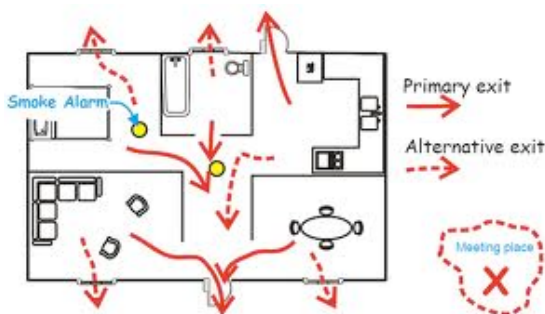
Alarm systems, fire extinguisher placement, addressing requirements, sprinkler systems and fire department access to hydrants play a role in the fire escape plan designed for each apartment. But the key question that needs to always be taken into account by management is this: Can our plan work for EVERY resident? Is generic good enough?

When considering the 15% of our population who have disabilities recognized by the ADA (e.g. challenges with movement, hearing, cognitive ability or mental health) or the more than 50% of our population with access and functional needs recognized by FEMA as persons requiring additional assistance in an emergency (e.g. latchkey children, persons recovering from recent surgery, individuals who cannot communicate in

English, or isolated elderly), it is critical to plan for fire alert and escape systems that can better assure the safety of every tenant.

Make the time to take a second look at your residents in terms of providing meaningful fire safety.

✓ Can everyone in your units perceive a fire alarm? Do tenants who are deaf or hard of hearing have strobe detectors and/or vibrating signal devices that help them know when there is a fire situation in their own unit and in the complex?



- ✓ Could every tenant in a non-sprinklered building get themselves outside to safety? Are there persons requiring wheelchairs who live above the first floor? Is there a place of refuge for persons in wheelchairs to shelter in place?
- ✓ Do you maintain a list of tenants, including those with access and functional needs, to provide firefighters important rescue information should there be a major fire?
- ✓ Are hallways kept clear of furniture, bikes, carts or decorations that would interfere with exiting or rescue in a fire situation with low visibility because of smoke?

For additional information on fire safety for all, go to www.nfpa.org and review the e-Access electronic newsletters. You can sign up for your free copy of these informative newsletters at www.nfpa.org/e-access.

What if you can't hear the ALARM ?



Hearing loss is often referred to as the invisible disability and it impacts over 20,000 persons in Spokane County. Many people lose their ability to distinguish high frequency sound as they age. Others are military veterans who lost their hearing from wartime exposure to roadside bombs. Young people are experiencing more frequent hearing loss because of exposure to high decibel music via earphones.

Most audible smoke detectors are equipped with high frequency alarms that persons with hearing loss simply cannot hear. Every tenant has the right to a fire alarm device that will in fact alert them to a fire threat. This not only helps the tenant, it protects other residents, reduces property loss and reduces the owners liability in the event of injury or death.

One solution for persons with hearing loss is a LIFETONE receiver that translates the high frequency sound from an audible detector to a lower frequency and then activates a vibrating device placed under a pillow. However, persons choosing this device must be sure that the audible detector is a photoelectric or dual-sensor ion-photo model. Otherwise, the LIFETONE receiver (see www.lifetonesafety.com) may not activate to a smoldering type of fire because of the limitation of typical ionization detectors. Of the two types of audible detectors on the market, photoelectric units detect smoldering fires ten to forty minutes faster than ionization models.

For additional information on smoke detectors for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, contact the Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center in Seattle at www.hsdcc.org, Harris Communications at www.harriscomm.com, or compare strobe detectors on Amazon.

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at jdoherty@spokanefire.org or by calling 509.625.7058.



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