

# University of California, Berkeley

## Evacuation Policy for People with Disabilities

(as outlined in the Building Emergency Plan for each building on campus)

The following guidelines have been adopted by the Berkeley campus to assist in planning for the evacuation of people with physical disabilities.

### IN ALL EMERGENCIES, AFTER AN EVACUATION HAS BEEN ORDERED:

- Evacuate people with disabilities if possible.
- Do not use elevators, unless authorized to do so by police or fire personnel. Elevators could fail during a fire or a major earthquake.
- If the situation is life threatening, call 911.
- Check on people with special needs during an evacuation. A "buddy system", where people with disabilities arrange for volunteers (co-workers/ neighbors) to alert them and assist them in an emergency, is a good method.
- Attempt a rescue evacuation ONLY if you have had rescue training or the person is in immediate danger and cannot wait for professional assistance.
- Always ask someone with a disability how you can help BEFORE attempting any rescue technique or giving assistance. Ask how he or she can best be assisted or moved, and whether there are any special considerations or items that need to come with the person.

### RESPONSES TO EMERGENCIES:

#### BLINDNESS OR VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Bomb Threat, Earthquake, Fire, Hazardous Materials Releases, and Power Outages:

- Give verbal instructions to advise about the safest route or direction using compass directions, estimated distances, and directional terms.
- Do not grasp a visually impaired person's arm. Ask if he or she would like to hold onto your arm as you exit, especially if there is debris or a crowd.
- Give other verbal instructions or information (i.e. elevators cannot be used).

#### DEAFNESS OR HEARING LOSS

Bomb Threat, Earthquake, Fire, Hazardous Materials Releases, and Power Outages:

- Get the attention of a person with a hearing disability by touch and eye contact. Clearly state the problem. Gestures and pointing are helpful, but be prepared to write a brief statement if the person does not seem to understand.
- Offer visual instructions to advise of safest route or direction by pointing toward exits or evacuation maps.

#### MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT

Bomb Threat, Earthquake, Fire, and Hazardous Materials Releases:

- It may be necessary to help clear the exit route of debris (if possible) so that the person with a disability can move out or to a safer area.
- If people with mobility impairments cannot exit, they should move to a *safer area*, e.g.,
  - most enclosed stairwells

- an office with the door shut which is a good distance from the hazard (and away from falling debris in the case of earthquakes)
- If you do not know the safer areas in your building, call the campus Fire Prevention Division at 642-3073 for a building survey.
- Notify police or fire personnel immediately about any people remaining in the building and their locations.
- Police or fire personnel will decide whether people are safe where they are and will evacuate them as necessary. The Fire Department may determine that it is safe to override the rule against using elevators.
- If people are in immediate danger and cannot be moved to a safer area to wait for assistance, it may be necessary to evacuate them using an evacuation chair or a carry technique.

#### Power Outages:

- If an outage occurs during the day and people with disabilities choose to wait in the building for electricity to be restored, they can move near a window where there is natural light and access to a working telephone. During regular building hours, BCs should be notified so they can advise emergency personnel.
- If people would like to leave and an evacuation has been ordered, or if the outage occurs at night, call Police at 642-3073 from a campus telephone to request evacuation assistance from the Fire Department.
- Some multi-button campus telephones may not operate in a power outage, but single-line telephones and pay telephones are likely to be operating. As soon as information is available, the campus emergency information line (642-4335) will have a recorded message stating when power is likely to be restored.

## **EMERGENCY EVACUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:**

Evacuating a disabled or injured person yourself is the last resort. Consider your options and the risks of injuring yourself and others in an evacuation attempt. Do not make an emergency situation worse.

Evacuation is difficult and uncomfortable for both the rescuers and the people being assisted. Some people have conditions that can be aggravated or triggered if they are moved incorrectly. Remember that environmental conditions (smoke, debris, loss of electricity) will complicate evacuation efforts.

The following guidelines are general and may not apply in every circumstance:

- Occupants should be invited to *volunteer* ahead of time to assist disabled people in an emergency. If a volunteer is not available, designate someone to assist who is willing to accept the responsibility.
- Volunteers should obtain evacuation training for certain types of lifting techniques through the Disabled Students' Program (D.S.P.).
- Two or more trained volunteers, if available, should conduct the evacuation.
- DO NOT evacuate disabled people in their wheelchairs. This is standard practice to ensure the safety of disabled people and volunteers. Wheelchairs will be evacuated later if possible.

- Always ASK disabled people how you can help BEFORE attempting any rescue technique or giving assistance. Ask how they can best be assisted or moved, and if there are any special considerations or items that need to come with them.
- Before attempting an evacuation, volunteers and the people being assisted should discuss how any lifting will be done and where they are going.
- Proper lifting techniques (e.g. bending the knees, keeping the back straight, holding the person close before lifting, and using leg muscles to lift) should be used to avoid injury to rescuers' backs. Ask permission of the evacuee if an evacuation chair or similar device is being considered as an aid in an evacuation. When using such devices, make sure the person is secured properly. Be careful on stairs and rest at landings if necessary.
- Certain lifts may need to be modified depending on the person's disabilities.

### **Summary:**

Prepare occupants in your building ahead of time for emergency evacuations. Know your building occupants. Train staff, faculty, and students to be aware of the needs of people with disabilities and to know how to offer assistance. Hold evacuation drills in which occupants participate, and evaluate drills to identify areas that need improvement. Plans must cover regular working hours, after hours, and weekends. Everyone needs to take responsibility for preparing for emergencies. People with disabilities should consider what they would do and whether they need to take additional steps to prepare. "Emergency Guidelines for People with Disabilities" is available from your BC or DSC.

If you have questions about this campus policy or need additional information, contact one of the organizations below:

- Evacuation policies: OEP, 642-9036
- Student disability issues: Disabled Students' Program, 642-0518 (voice), 642-6376 (TTY /TDD)
- Fire regulations, safe areas: Campus Fire Prevention Division, EH&S, 642-3073

*Prepared by OEP and EH&S  
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