

Special Populations



Individuals with disabilities, such as persons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or that have visual impairments, need to plan in advance in order to increase their chances of surviving a fire. By answering three simple questions, individuals can easily develop escape plans. Questions to consider are: Where are all the exits in my home? Can I get out by myself, or do I need help? And, what kind of assistance might I need?

The last question, "What kind of assistance might I need?" is a particularly important one because it focuses not only on the human assistance a person may require, but also extends to life-saving devices, such as smoke alarms.

Because fire safety information is critical to planning and overall preparedness, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs recommend the following safety tips for special populations:

- Include everyone in your home and make a home escape plan, making provisions for anyone who has a disability. Practice your plan at least twice a year.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside of each sleeping area.
- When developing your evacuation plan, remember to inform others if you have special needs. For example, if you live in an apartment building you may want to share your plan with the appropriate building and management personnel or your local fire department.
- If necessary, have a ramp available for emergency exits.
- Unless instructed by the fire department, never use an elevator during a fire.
- Be sure your street address is clearly marked and visible from the street.
- Know which local emergency services are available and have those numbers posted or memorized.
- People with hearing impairments cannot hear alarms and voice announcements that warn of danger and the need to evacuate.
- If you are deaf or hard-of-hearing consider using alarms with strobe (flashing) lights that have been tested by an independent testing laboratory. The alarms for sleeping areas with strobe lights are required to be of a special high intensity that can wake a sleeping person. In addition, smoke alarms with a strobe light outside the house can catch the attention of neighbors or others who might pass by.
- In addition, if there is fire or smoke, get out immediately and go to the designated meeting place. But if you are trapped by fire or smoke, have your TTY/TTD device or other alerting system close to the bed so that communication with emergency personnel is possible should fire or smoke trap you in your room.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS

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