

Emergency Evacuation Guidelines for Persons Needing Assistance

The intent of these guidelines is to provide a safe environment for all individuals, including persons needing assistance, during emergency evacuations. Persons with disabilities are encouraged to contact Human Resources and/or the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities to determine what accommodations that may be necessary to maintain safety, for these needs may vary on a case-by-case basis and by individual and location.

I. Develop a Plan

Knowledge and preparation by every individual, both by those with and without disabilities, is essential to reduce the risk of injury and harm during emergencies. Everyone at West Chester University is responsible for becoming familiar with the emergency information regarding work areas, classrooms, and/or living areas. This includes emergency evacuation plans comprising: exits, alternate routes of egress, the location of fire alarm pull stations, portable fire extinguishers and respective designated meeting places.

A. Area of Rescue Assistance

An area which has direct access to an exit, where people who are unable to use stairs may remain temporarily in safety to await further instructions or assistance during emergency evacuation. Most Areas of Rescue Assistance are located in stairwells or vestibules that are physically separated from the remainder of the floor by approved fire rated doors.

B. In Classroom Buildings and Administration Buildings

Prepare for an emergency ahead of time by instructing a classmate, instructor, supervisor or co-worker on how you may need assistance in the event of an emergency.

Be aware of the location of the nearest stairwell and Area of Rescue Assistance. If you will be working in an isolated area of the building, inform another student, staff member, or faculty member of your location.

C. In Residence Halls

Contact your floor's Resident Assistant(s) on move in day to schedule a time to review building evacuation procedures.

In the event of a fire or emergency evacuation, proceed immediately to the center stairwell landing and Contact Department of Public Safety at (610) 436-3311. Wait in the area for West Chester University Police Officers or members of the West Chester Fire Department to assist you from the building.

If you are in your room and require assistance, notify the Department of Public Safety at (610) 436-3311 or extension 3311 of your location so that this information can be forwarded to first responders.

II. Instructions for Persons NEEDING assistance in an Emergency Evacuation

Please follow these instructions in case of an emergency:

- If you are on the ground floor of the building, exit by normal means as quickly as possible.
- If you are above or below the ground floor and not able to exit without assistance, relocate or be moved to a designated Area of Rescue Assistance. Most of the Areas of Rescue Assistance can be found in enclosed stairwells.
- Notify the Department of Public Safety at (610) 436-3311 or extension 3311 of your location. If you are unable to contact DPS, have someone else notify them of your location, if possible. Wait for first responders to arrive and remain calm.
- Do not use the elevators unless directed to do so by the WCU Police or Fire Department personnel.

Members of the WCU Police Department or members of the West Chester Fire Department will assist you from the building.

A. Staying in Place

Individuals with disabilities or other conditions that do not allow them to evacuate with others should include in their personal action plan their specific "Stay in Place" location (i.e., office, resident hall room, classrooms). It is the responsibility of every member of the university community to immediately notify emergency personnel of the location of individuals who are unable to evacuate.

- Remain in a room with an exterior window and a telephone.
- Close the door, if possible.
- Notify the Department of Public Safety at (610) 436-3311 or extension 3311 of your location. The dispatcher will assist by notifying on-scene emergency personnel of the location of the person who needs evacuation assistance.
- If a phone is not available, signal from the window by waving a cloth or other visible object

III. Instructions for Persons PROVIDING Evacuation Assistance

Persons with disabilities may require special consideration in an emergency due to potential dependence on mechanical aids or the assistance of others. Visible and hidden disabilities may become debilitating under the stress and strain of an emergency. If you are on the ground floor of the building, exit by normal means as quickly as possible. If you choose to assist someone in an emergency situation, do not expose yourself or others to unnecessary risk by attempting to provide assistance beyond your ability.

1. Ask

Always ASK someone with a disability or other conditions how you can help BEFORE giving assistance. Ask how best to assist the individual and whether there are any special considerations or items needed.

- The individual with the disability is the expert on his or her disability, so ask that individual for advice before assisting that person.
- Take extra time when communicating with people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability.
- If you are asked to be an evacuation assistant, discuss roles and expectations with the individual who has asked you to assist him or her, including requesting a copy of his/her Personal Action Plan and discussing appropriate exit strategies, so that you are prepared in the event of an emergency.

2. Notify

Notify First Responders that you are providing evacuation assistance.

- **Call 911 for life/safety emergencies** or the Public Safety at 610-436-3311
- Identify the building and floor where you are located, and how you plan to evacuate.
- Provide a description of your situation, as appropriate.

3. Assist

Evaluate Conditions – Exit the premises, if possible, or find a safe location to shelter in place.

- Identify existing options and select the nearest appropriate exit, including, potentially, an Area of Refuge if you are assisting a person using a wheelchair or with other mobility restrictions.
- Do not use the elevator unless personnel have directed you to do so.
- It may be necessary to help clear the exit route of obstructions or debris (if possible) so that the person with a disability can move out or to a safer area.

4. Assisting Persons with Hearing loss or Deafness

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.

- Face a D/HH person directly and speak naturally, even if an interpreter is present. The deaf person may be trying to read your lips. Do not cover your face with your hands or other objects that you may be holding. The person may be trying to see your facial expressions. Eye contact is important also.
- Wave or tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm to attract attention since the D/HH person may not be aware there is an alarm.
- Flick the light to get attention in a crowded room, especially to attract the attention of a D/HH person. Rapid, repeated flickering would be considered rude in an everyday situation, but is deemed appropriate in an emergency.
- Have a means of communication available so that both you and the D/HH person can communicate in writing or text using mobile devices.
- Do not allow others to interrupt you, or the D/HH person, during your conversation. Distractions may result in confusion.
- Use your natural gestures to communicate urgency, e.g., “come on”, “get out”, etc.
- Hearing aids or an implant may not be adequate in an emergency situation. Aids and implants amplify background noise, and may create an uncomfortable noise level during the bustle of an emergency.

5. Assisting Persons with Psychological Disabilities

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.
- 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.

6. Assisting Persons with Assistance Animals

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.
- Do not pet, distract, interact with, make eye contact with, talk to, take pictures of or otherwise bother an assistance animal. Do not offer food or water unless requested by the handler.
- Plan for the assistance animal to be evacuated with the handler.

- In the event that you are asked to handle the assistance animal while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness.
- Be aware assistance animals may fear metal grated steps.

7. Assisting Persons with Visual impairments or Blindness

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.
- Speak naturally and directly to the blind or low vision person, not through a third party. Do not shout.
- Explain who you are, why you are there, and what needs to be done.
- Ask the person's name and use it when speaking to the person.
- Offer your help, but let the person choose what help is needed. If assisted by a service animal, ask how to best work together. The service animal may be able to follow you out of the building.
- Let the individual take your elbow for walking. The person may wish to walk slightly behind you in order to gauge your reactions to obstacles and curbs.
- Always explain what you want to do ahead of time. You should provide verbal cues when maneuvering around obstacles or corners and going up or down changes in elevation.
- Let the person tell you what is desired or needed.

8. Assisting Persons Who Use Wheelchairs and other Non-Ambulatory Persons

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.
- A wheelchair is part of the user's body space and should be respected. Never maneuver a person's chair without permission.
- Ask how the chair operates and if there are any special operational instructions.
- Avoid narrow doorways and openings, stairs, bumpy surfaces, and wet floors. Be alert for objects in your path.

- Be aware that the wheelchair user might be able to walk with the assistance of a cane, crutches or braces.
- Position the person in the safest place possible according to the emergency, preferably a designated “Area of Rescue Assistance”.
- Alert emergency personnel of the person’s location.
- *No imminent danger.* If there is no imminent danger, the person may choose to remain in the Area of Refuge (stairwell) until emergency personnel arrive. Fire Department personnel, who are trained in emergency rescue, can then enter the building and assist the person in exiting the building, either down the stairs or using the emergency elevator recall.
- ***Imminent danger.*** If danger is imminent and the individual does not wish to be removed from their wheelchair; notify emergency personnel immediately. While staying in place, the wheelchair user should keep in direct contact with Public Safety by dialing (610) 436-3311 or 911 from a (cell) phone and reporting directly pertinent information including the location.
- Carrying wheelchair users. Most wheelchairs are too heavy to carry down stairs. If the person wishes to be carried down the stairs without the wheelchair, consult with them on the best carry options, e.g., two-person cradle carry or, if available, an evacuation chair.
- Be cautious in attempting to lift an individual from a wheelchair. This should only be done in the most extreme of circumstances. Do not use a wheelchair to transport an individual down or upstairs.
- Mobility aids or devices. Return any mobility aids or devices to the person as soon as possible

9. Assisting Persons with Mobility Limitation – Non-Wheelchair Users

- Always ask whether the person needs assistance before acting and explain what needs to be done.
- Do not interfere with the person’s movement via physical touch, unless directed; give the individual space to evacuate if desired.
- Do not interfere with the person’s movement.
- Clear displaced and fallen obstacles from egress routes.
- If the stairs are crowded, you may act as a buffer.
- Provide railing access for those with limited mobility.

- Some people may need to descend the stairs sitting down; be sure to provide space so the individual is not stepped on.

10. Special Considerations

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 people being assisted. Some people have conditions that can be aggravated or triggered if they are moved incorrectly. Remember that environmental conditions (e.g., smoke, debris, loss of electricity) will complicate evacuation efforts. Emergency personnel have extensive training in evacuation procedures and the proper equipment for any kind of carrying or transfer.

- Try to avoid separating a person with a disability from their assistive aids, including wheelchairs, canes, hearing aids, medications, special diet food, urinary supplies, etc.
- **Police or Fire personnel will decide whether people are safe where they are and will evacuate them as necessary.**

11. Shelter in Place

If a person with a mobility disability cannot exit, assist the individual to a safer area, including an office or classroom and close the door. EXIT STAIRWELLS can be used effectively; they are fire protected and have direct access for emergency responders. If you can, go for help!

- If conditions suggest that exit paths may be blocked, evaluate locations to shelter in place against worsening conditions and go for help.
- If you and/or a person with disability are unable to exit the building, identify the location of the sheltering person to responders so they can execute a rescue.
- If you are in immediate danger and cannot move to a safer area, CALL 911 and wait for assistance.