

# Mid-Level and High-Rise Apartment Safety for People with Disabilities

For the best protection from fire, select a fully sprinklered building. Sprinklers can control and may extinguish a fire even before the fire department arrives. If your building is not sprinklered, ask building management to consider installing a sprinkler system.



## Meet with Your Building Manager

- Request a copy of the building evacuation procedures. Ask about the emergency evacuation drills and insist on being included. At some locations, only occupants of the fire floor and one floor above and below are evacuated. Check with your municipality.
- Provide management with a copy of the NFPA Emergency Evacuation Guide for People with Disabilities: [www.nfpa.org/disabilities](http://www.nfpa.org/disabilities).
- Learn the accommodations that have been made to meet your needs for evacuation assistance.
  - If you are deaf or hard of hearing, discuss the assistive devices you'll need to alert you to an emergency. These may include smoke alarms, accessories or appliances that use strobe lights, vibration equipment, scrolling signs or message boards, and closed-circuit television monitors, which should use ASL-inserted interpretation.
  - People who are deaf – those with profound hearing loss – should use smoke alarms, accessories, or appliances that use strobe lights and vibration equipment.



- People who are hard of hearing – those with mild to severe hearing loss – should use appliances or equipment that emits a mixed, low-pitched sound. Some of this equipment is designed to be activated by the sound of a traditional smoke alarm. The low-pitched sound is more effective than the sound of traditional smoke alarms for waking people up in all age groups.
- If you use a wheelchair or have another mobility impairment, learn the steps that have been taken to assist in your evacuation. Assistance may include:
  - emergency evacuation stair descent equipment.
  - an area of refuge – with two-way communication to allow you to alert first responders or building staff to your presence –which could be the elevator lobby or exit stair landing, where you would await evacuation assistance by building staff or first responders.
  - arrangements to have your wheelchair or a loaner available after your evacuation.
  - your name, apartment location, and type of assistance required posted in the fire command center and the fire alarm panel.

## Contact the Fire Department about Concerns for Your Safe Evacuation

- Learn about the department’s search and rescue procedures for your building.
- Ask the department to review with you your building’s evacuation plan and your own personal safety plan. Some departments have voluntary registries for people who may need extra assistance.
- If you have a service animal, discuss with your fire department plans to evacuate the animal with you.





## Be Prepared

- Learn the location of the exit stairwells and all routes out of the building. Know the number of doors between your apartment and the nearest exits.
- Hard-wired, interconnected smoke alarms provide the best protection in the case of fire. Most municipalities require them. When one sounds, they all sound. Ask what other warning systems are in place for storms, environmental hazards, thunderstorms, or tornadoes.
- Smoke alarms should be installed outside each sleeping area, inside each sleeping room, and – if applicable – on every level of the apartment.
- Report all hazards, such as piled trash, blocked exits, or missing exit lights, to your building manager.

- Develop relationships with neighbors, who can be trusted to be “buddies” in the event you need assistance with evacuation, but be sure to have multiple back-up plans in case the buddy isn't available at the time of the emergency.
- Have an escape plan and practice it. Remember that in the event of a fire, cleaner air is down low near the floor, so get low and go. Before opening a door, feel the doorknob and door. If either is hot, leave the door closed and use your second way out.
  - Keep any doors closed between you and the smoke or fire. If you can't leave, be prepared to cover vents and cracks around doors with cloths or tape.
  - Call 911 with your exact location: address, floor level, and room. Signal for help at a window for rescuers, using a light-colored cloth or a flashlight.
- Keep a phone by your bed for emergency calls in case you become trapped and are unable to escape. Put emergency numbers in the speed dial directory of your phones.
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing find out if the 911 or other emergency center is equipped to accept cell phone text messages or text telephone (TTY/TDD) calls.

