



# Accessibility Standard for Employment

providing emergency  
response information for  
employees with disabilities



## please note:

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# introduction

As an employer, you want to keep your employees safe, especially in emergencies. Ontario's Accessibility Standard for Employment can help you do that. Under the standard, if you have employees with disabilities you must provide individualized emergency response information to them by January 1, 2012.

This includes making your emergency information accessible, or developing a plan to help an employee with a disability during an emergency.

## **Quick Fact: What is accessible information?**

You can make a document accessible by recreating it in a different format; for example, printing it in large print for someone with vision loss. This is called an "accessible format."

But you can also make information accessible by helping someone to use the original document or resource; for example, by reading it aloud. This is called a "communication support." Other examples include adding captioning to videos or using written notes to communicate with someone who is hard of hearing.

Everyone is different, so simply do what works best.

# what you need to do

If you know an employee might need help in an emergency due to a permanent or temporary disability:

- Provide individualized emergency response information to the employee
- Get the employee's consent, then share this information with the people designated to help them in an emergency
- Review the employee's emergency response information when:
  - the employee changes work locations
  - you review the employee's overall accommodation needs
  - you review your organization's general emergency response policies.

## Example

Ingrid works the night shift at a call centre. A poster listing tips to keep employees safe in an emergency is on the wall outside her cubicle. But Ingrid has vision loss and can't read it. Her manager e-mails Ingrid the tips which she can read with her screen reader.

An "employee" includes paid staff, but not a volunteer or unpaid staff.

## Quick Fact

Disabilities can be permanent, or temporary. For example, an employee with a broken leg might need help using stairs or opening doors for a short period of time.

# steps to consider when providing emergency response information

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to developing individual emergency response information. The law does not specify what accommodations employers must make or what information you must provide. It's flexible so you can work with your staff to determine what they need in an emergency situation. Here are some ideas that may help you:

## 1. review your emergency information

Look at evacuation plans, fire safety plans, emergency maps, alarm systems, fire exits, firefighter elevators, designated waiting areas and any other emergency information, systems or features you provide. Ask yourself, how do staff learn about an emergency and what are they expected to do?

## 2. determine who needs help

Employees with disabilities may tell you about the information they need to respond to an emergency; but if they don't think about it, you have to. If you know an employee has a disability, and you're not sure if they would need help in an emergency, you should ask. If you are unaware that they have a disability, you aren't expected to provide customized emergency information. However, it's a good idea to ask everyone. You could send a memo, or ask during employee orientation. Every organization is different, so do what works best for everyone in your workplace.

[Appendix A is a sample memo to ask staff if they need individualized emergency information.]

What information might help employees to stay safe? For example, after eye surgery, an employee who has low vision may need help finding the exit in a blackout. Even though this disability is temporary, talk to them about it and see what help they may need before an emergency strikes.

Sometimes figuring out what help may be needed is easy:

- People with hearing loss may need someone to alert them during audible alarms or announcements.
- Individuals with vision loss may need help with written instructions, or finding escape routes and avoiding objects. They may need more time to evacuate.
- Someone with a mobility disability, such as a broken leg or permanent paralysis, may need help leaving the workplace, using stairs or opening doors.

Other times it may be more difficult:

- Someone with asthma may need help walking long distances or with stairs, especially if there is smoke, dust, fumes or chemicals in the air.
- A person with a speech disability may need different ways to communicate in an emergency.
- A person with a mental health disability may have trouble dealing with high anxiety, panic or stress in an emergency.

### **Example**

Solmaz has a mental health disability and gets anxious in crowds. She works on the top floor and her evacuation route goes through narrow corridors and down several flights of stairs. Solmaz is worried that evacuating with a crowd could increase her anxiety. She could panic and put herself and other employees at risk.

After letting her employer know her concerns, Solmaz got new instructions that included waiting for most staff to exit before she evacuates. She also walked the evacuation route with her manager and they identified areas where she could safely step out of the flow of people if she feels anxious.

During their discussion, Solmaz said that she would feel better if she was with someone she knew. So another staff member was asked and agreed to walk with her.

### 3. prepare and provide emergency information

Once you know who may need help, find out what kind of help they need. For example, you could meet with them or give them a questionnaire. Ask if they need information in an accessible format.

[Appendix B is a sample worksheet to help you identify barriers and how to overcome them.]

How you provide emergency information depends on how complex the information is, the employee's needs and your organization's resources. But whether you provide emergency information verbally, in a written format or in another way, do so as soon as you can.

If the employee needs help in an emergency, get their consent, then share the emergency information with the people who will help them. Don't share details of the employee's medical condition or disability, just what kind of help they need.

[Appendix C is a sample employee emergency response information template.]

#### **Example**

Beth is Deaf and works for a church that uses audible fire alarms. After reviewing the church's fire safety plan, the priest realized that Beth would not be able to hear the alarm. The priest assigned two employees who work with Beth to let her know if the alarm goes off. He sent Beth an email and asked her to let him know if she had any concerns or needed other accommodations.

## 4. follow up

Review the information if the employee moves to a different location, or whenever you review the employee's accommodation needs or your emergency policies and procedures. For example, if you hold an emergency evacuation drill, you may want to check how well the information worked.

### **Example**

Josef is an accountant who works on the sixth floor. Last month he broke his leg, so until it's healed he uses a wheelchair and takes the elevator. But in an emergency, the elevators are not available and staff use the stairs. Josef hasn't thought about it, but his employer has and knows he can't take the stairs. His employer talks to Josef about developing individualized emergency response information.

Josef's employer decides to purchase an evacuation chair to help him get down the six flights of stairs. With Josef's consent, two colleagues are trained to use the chair and shown where it's kept.



# additional resources

- The **Guide for Evacuating People Who Need Assistance in an Emergency** helps you to identify what information at-risk individuals might need and develop practical strategies to help keep them safe. Visit: **[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability\\_issues/doc/pfs/page00.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/doc/pfs/page00.shtml)**.
- The **Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/ Special Needs** helps people with disabilities prepare for an emergency. It also includes tips for helping people with disabilities in an emergency situation and a list of emergency and disability related organizations. Visit **[emergencymanagementontario.ca](http://emergencymanagementontario.ca)** and click “special needs”.
- The **Accessible Digital Office Documents Project** is a one-stop shop for creating accessible digital documents using today’s most popular office applications (Microsoft, OpenOffice, iWork, Corel, GoogleDocs, etc.) at **<http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>**.
- Learn more about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and find free tools and templates at **[ontario.ca/AccessON](http://ontario.ca/AccessON)**.
- Contact your local fire department or organizations that help people with a specific type of disability.

## Example

When training new hires, a large retail store asks employees to study the evacuation map posted at both of the store’s main exits. Pierre has low vision, and during his orientation his manager realizes that Pierre will need help to understand the map. He explains the map in detail and walks Pierre through the escape route until he feels comfortable with it. Pierre says that he is worried about obstacles, like clothing racks, that get moved around and that he might bump into. So his manager decides to establish a “buddy system” for emergencies.

# Appendix A: sample employee memo

**Subject:** Employee safety during emergencies

At [\_\_\_\_\_], we take employee safety seriously.

If you have a disability, whether permanent or temporary, and may need help during an emergency, please let me know. I will ask you to complete a self-assessment form, then work with you to develop individualized emergency response information that will meet your needs in an emergency situation.

Please note that I do not need to know the details of your medical condition or disability, only the kind of help you may need. The information you provide will be kept confidential and only shared with your consent.

If you have questions or you already have emergency response information and need to adjust it, please let me know.

Thank you.

Manager's Name

# Appendix B: sample employee emergency information worksheet

Please complete this worksheet to help us identify barriers that could arise in an emergency situation and provide suggestions on how to overcome them. Your input will help us provide you with individualized emergency information.

The information collected is confidential and will only be shared with your consent. You **do not** have to provide details of your medical condition or disability, only the type of help you may need in an emergency.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Employee Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Emergency Contact Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

## Work Location

1. Where do you work?

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Floor: \_\_\_\_\_ Room Name/Number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you work in different places on a regular basis? Yes  No

List the addresses, floors and room locations.

## Potential Emergency Response Barriers

3. Can you see or hear the fire/security alarm signal? Yes  No  Don't Know

If no, what would help you know the alarm was flashing/ringing?

4. Can you activate the fire/security alarm system? Yes  No  Don't Know

If no, what would help you sound the alarm?

5. Can you talk to emergency staff? Yes  No

If no, what would help you to communicate with them?

6. Can you use the emergency exits? Yes  No  Don't Know

If no, what would help you to exit the building?

7. Does your mobility device fit in the emergency waiting area? Yes  No  Don't Know

If no, what would help it fit, or is there a better location?

8. Could you find the exit if it was smoky or dark? Yes  No

If no, what would help you find the exit?

9. Can you exit the building by yourself? Yes  No

If no, what would help you to get out?

10. Can you get into an emergency evacuation chair by yourself?

Yes  No  Don't Know  N/A

If no, what help do you need?

11. Would you be able to evacuate during a stressful and crowded situation?

Yes  No

If no, what would help you evacuate?

12. Can you read/access our emergency information?

Yes  No

If no, what would make this information available to you?

13. If you need help to evacuate, what instructions do people need to help you?

14. If you need other accommodations in an emergency, please list them here.



# Appendix C: sample employee emergency response information template

## **Instructions**

Use the information collected in the employee emergency information worksheet to create individualized emergency responses for each employee with a disability. Feel free to modify the form if an employee needs different types of accommodations for different types of emergencies.

All information in this document is confidential and will only be shared with the employee's consent.

## **Individualized Workplace Emergency Response Information for:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Emergency Contact Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

## Work Location

(Repeat for other work locations)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Floor: \_\_\_\_\_ Room Name/Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Emergency Alerts

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ] will be informed of an emergency situation by:

Existing alarm system:

Pager device:

Visual alarm system:

Co-worker:

Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## Assistance Methods

List types of assistance

(e.g. staff assistance, transfer instructions, etc.)

## Equipment Provided

List any devices, where they are stored, and how to use them

### **Evacuation Route and/or Procedure**

Provide a step-by-step description, beginning from the first sign of an emergency

### **Alternate Evacuation Route**

### **Emergency Support Staff**

The following people have been designated to help ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) in an emergency:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location and/or Contact Information</b>	<b>Type of Assistance</b>

**Consent to share individualized emergency response information**

I [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] consent to [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] sharing this individualized emergency response information with the individuals listed above, who have been designated to help me in an emergency.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Form completed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Manager)

Form reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Employee)

Next review date: \_\_\_\_\_