

## INFORMATION FOR RENTERS WITH DISABILITIES

### WHO QUALIFIES AS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY?

A person with a disability is defined as any person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life functions, (2) has a record of such impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such impairment.

### WHAT IS FAIR HOUSING?

The Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968) prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of dwellings, and in other housing-related transactions, based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (including children under the age of 18 living with parents of legal custodians, pregnant women, and people securing custody of children under the age of 18), and handicap (disability). Additional protection for persons with disabilities is provided by the ADA.

### WHAT IS THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT — THE ADA?

The ADA stands for the Americans with Disabilities Act. It was passed in 1990 by president George Bush in order to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. This Act was passed in an effort to mainstream people with disabilities and allow them the same opportunities offered people fully able by discouraging discrimination in four major areas: employment, public services, public accommodations and services operated by private entities, and telecommunications.

### HOW DOES THE ADA APPLY TO ME?

If you have a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities or have a record of such, your landlord may not:

- Refuse to let you make reasonable modifications to your dwelling or common use areas, at your expense, if necessary for you to use housing. (Where reasonable, the landlord may permit changes only if you agree to restore the property to its original condition when you move.)
- Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices or services if necessary for you to use the housing. (For example: An apartment complex that offers unassigned parking must honor a request from a mobility impaired tenant to have a reserved space near his/her apartment if he or she so chooses.)

In addition there are requirements for all new buildings under the ADA that are ready for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, and have an elevator in four or more units.

- Public areas must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Doors and hallways must be wide enough for wheelchairs.
- All units must have an accessible route into and through the unit, accessible light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls, reinforcements in the bathroom walls to allow the later installation of grab bars, and kitchen and bathrooms that can be used by people in wheelchairs.
- If the building with four or more units does not have an elevator, the aforementioned standards apply to ground floor units.

### WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MY RIGHTS?

- Disability Support Services  
[www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS](http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS)  
(301) 314-7682

Graduate Student Legal Aid  
[www.gradlegalaids.org](http://www.gradlegalaids.org)  
(301) 405-5807

Undergraduate Student Legal Aid  
[www.studentorg.umd.edu/legalaid](http://www.studentorg.umd.edu/legalaid)  
(301) 314-7756

Prince George's County Landlord-Tenant Relations  
(301) 699-2789

Montgomery County Landlord Tenant Relations  
(240) 777-3600

Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc.  
[www.bni-maryland.org](http://www.bni-maryland.org)  
(410) 243-6007

Fair Housing Accessibility FIRST  
[www.fairhousingfirst.org](http://www.fairhousingfirst.org)  
(888) 341-7781



# FIRE SAFETY FOR RENTERS WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

## UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

*Why are Special Populations at Risk?* Special populations are at risk for a number of reasons:

- Decreased mobility, health, sight, and hearing may limit a person's ability to take the quick action necessary to escape during a fire emergency.
- Depending on physical limitations, many of the actions an individual can take to protect themselves from the dangers of fire may require help from a caretaker, neighbor, or outside source.

## HAVE A SOUND FIRE SAFETY AND ESCAPE PLAN

It is vitally important to make and practice escape plans. In the event of a fire, remember, time is the biggest enemy and every second counts!

- Involve the assistance of a building manager, family member, or an entrusted friend when practicing your fire escape plan.
- Know at least two exits from every room.
- If you use a walker or wheelchair, check all exits to make sure they get through the doorways.
- Practice opening locked or barred doors and windows.
- When a fire occurs, do not waste any time saving property. Leave the home immediately. Once out, stay out.

## INFORM OTHERS OF YOUR SPECIAL NEEDS

Contact your local fire department on a non-emergency telephone number and explain your special needs.

- Your local fire department will be able to help you with your escape plan and may also be able to perform a home fire safety inspection, as well as offer suggestions about smoke alarm placement and maintenance.
- Ask emergency providers to keep your special needs information on file.

## DEVELOP A HOME FIRE SAFETY PLAN

People with mobility difficulties should be encouraged to have their bedroom on the ground floor and as close as possible to an exit.

- 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.

## INSTALL AND MAINTAIN SMOKE ALARMS

- Working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home dramatically increase your chances of survival.
- People with physical limitations should be aware of special fire safety devices that are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf and hard of hearing. In addition, smoke alarms with a strobe light outside the house can catch the attention of neighbors or others who might pass by.
- Smoke alarm batteries need to be tested every month and changed at least once a year. If you can't reach the test button on your smoke alarm, ask someone to inspect it for you.

**For More Information Contact:**  
**The United States Fire Administration**  
Office of Fire Management Programs  
(301) 447-1000  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

**Or visit the USFA website:**  
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/>