

LET'S OVERCOME DISABILITIES  
TOGETHER AGAINST DISASTERS

AFETLERE KARŞI ENGELLERİ  
BİRLİKTE AŞALIM



# FIRE PREPAREDNESS FOR THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED





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The parts of this study cannot be copied without reference. If used, the title of the study and the project have to be mentioned.

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of disasters occurring in the world and in our country has significantly increased recently and these disasters have brought about social, cultural and economic losses. The most effective way to protect yourself from disasters is being prepared against them and turning it into a lifestyle. For a safe life, Be Informed, Make a Plan, Be Prepared and Take Action!

Although disasters are impossible to prevent, minimizing their damage is possible only with a society that is informed, educated and organized. Aiming for each individual to be prepared against disasters and emergencies, this study presents the disadvantaged groups' proper actions within their own means and capabilities.

You can prepare yourself and your loved ones against disasters and emergencies better by evaluating your own personal needs and by preparing an emergency plan that fits these needs.

Do not forget that no one knows your needs, preferences and skills better than you. YOU ARE the expert of YOURSELF!

## BEFORE A FIRE

- ◆ There are some simple measures that you can take for fire safety precautions. These are;
  - Using fireproof materials of construction or materials which are difficult to burn,
  - Using smoke and gas detectors,
  - Having an active fire extinguisher which you can easily reach,
  - Not plugging many electrical appliances into a single socket,
  - Checking electricity and natural gas installations frequently,
  - Setting up an emergency alarm and lighting system,
  - Separating igniting and combustible material sources.



- ◆ Secure your home or office, corridors, windows and other areas in such a way that you can easily leave the building in an emergency. Relocate or remove furniture that may block your way out.



Image 1: Fixing items

- ◆ Make sure that the procedures for construction, use or modification of buildings are based on the “Regulation on the Protection of Buildings from Fire”.
- ◆ Create a **Disaster Plan** and a **Personal Support Network**;
  - Create a Disaster Plan with the people in your support network and decide on how to communicate and to evacuate during emergencies.
  - Create an escape/evacuation plan. Open and safe areas (parks, fields, school yards and safe empty areas) to meet family members after a fire should be determined with their alternatives. The chosen meeting point should be close to the places frequently visited like home, school and workplace. In case of being somewhere else other than these places during a fire, where and how to meet the family members should also be determined.
  - If you use a wheelchair or electric wheelchair, make sure that, in your Disaster Plan, all the corridors and evacuation ways to the exit are accessible for wheelchairs. If not, make them accessible.
  - One of the first steps of disaster preparedness for the disabled individuals is to decide on the people they can trust for support. A personal support network includes people who can contact you, check if you are well and help you when you are in need during emergencies.



Image 2: Disaster Plan

- A Personal Support Network consists of at least three people such as your family, neighbours and colleagues, those who are in walking distance from you.
- Create your Personal Support Network at home, at work and in the places you spend most of your time.
- People in your support network need to know how to enter your home to check you in case of danger and how to reach you when they cannot hear from you.
- Make sure the people in your personal support network are aware of your plan. Inform them about the support equipment and necessary documents.
- If you use a wheelchair or an electric wheelchair and need to evacuate a multi-storey building, keep an evacuation chair or a stretcher available at the stairwell of the same floor where you work or live. In this way, the people in your personal support network and rescue teams can easily reach you for evacuation.

- When there is no accessible exit and you need to evacuate the building you are in, determine the most appropriate way of evacuation with alternatives and practise with the people in your support network.
  - Especially if you are staying in a multi-storey apartment, a building complex or a large workplace, provide the staff and administrators with a list about your disability, your special needs, your building and living space. This is important for active intervention by officers in the case of a possible disaster or emergency.
- ◆ Perform **drills** based on different scenarios.
  - In these drills, consider situations such as the presence and absence of the people on your support network during a fire. Drills should include both what to do during the fire and evacuation after the fire, and they should be practised in all places (home, school, workplace) where you are frequently present.
    - Problems and difficulties encountered during the drills will allow you to revise your plan and develop appropriate action patterns.
    - In order to prepare for evacuation drills, first an exit plan must be made. While making this plan, the possibilities of being alone and being with the people in the support network during the fire should be considered. The plan should be applied with the people in the support network, and the exit routes should be determined with their alternatives by evaluating the features of the place where you are during the fire.

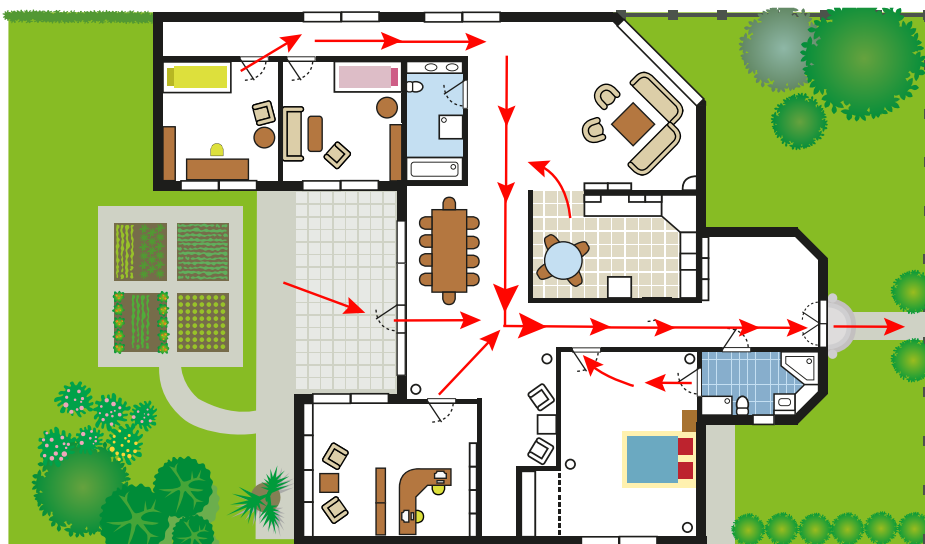
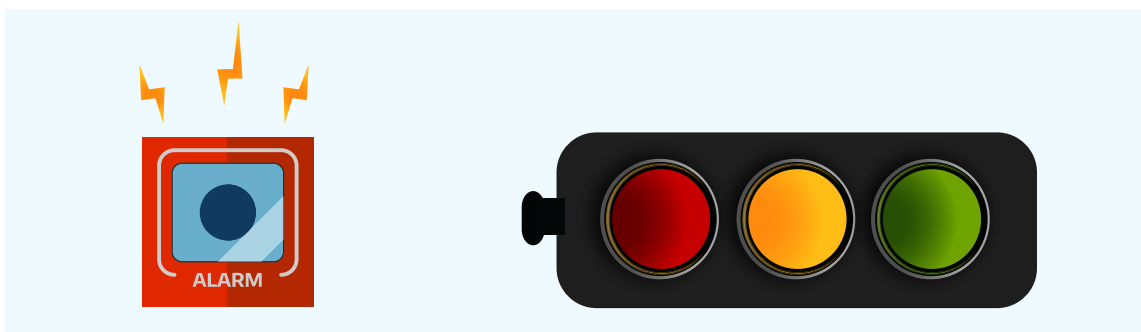


Image 3: Evacuation/exit plan



- Fire safety corridors constructed in buildings such as apartments, workplaces, shopping centers and sites are safe areas to prevent smoke from spreading to escape ladders and exit area, and for the injured and the disabled to wait. Practise going to the fire safety corridor in the places in your location.
- ◆ If you are using a wheelchair, a walker or electric wheelchair, find out how to gain mobility in case the wheels and tyres are damaged due to flame and heat.
- ◆ Depending on your disability, keep your assistive equipment such as shoes, prostheses, wheelchair, walker or walking cane near you or your bed.
- ◆ A call button or a fire alarm system must be set up in the living space of the individuals with a physical disability due to limb loss.
- ◆ Have a fire extinguisher in a place that is easily accessible for fire hazards in your living area, and get support from your local fire brigade and AFAD officers on their use when necessary.
  - If you cannot use the fire extinguisher due to your disability, make sure that the people in your personal support group learn how to use them.
- ◆ Users of wheelchairs or electric wheelchairs must learn to take position against fires and intervene in fire with a fire extinguisher to the extent their condition allows them. Both they and their companions must be informed about fire extinguishers.
- ◆ Have smoke alarms installed in your home and workplace and test them at certain periods.
- ◆ Make sure that the exit and evacuation doors open outwards.



◆ **Prepare a Disaster and Emergency Kit**

• Disasters and emergencies can happen anytime anywhere, and you may not find an opportunity to search for or get the supplies you need. Prepare a disaster and emergency kit containing special needs and essential life support materials depending on your disability and keep your bag in easy-to-access locations for you.

• **Recommended content:** Medical supplies, water, dry food, emergency contact information, a note on the difficulties in communication, a copy of important documents (insurance, title deed, ID, passport, prescriptions etc.) and contact details of people in your support network, a flashlight and batteries, a radio, clothes, a whistle, work gloves to move the wheelchair safely and to clean the ruins, hygiene supplies, first aid kit, dust mask and goggles, a blanket, current photos of family members, spare keys of your car and home, baby food, diapers, a feeding bottle, a pacifier etc.



Image 4: Disaster and Emergency Kit.





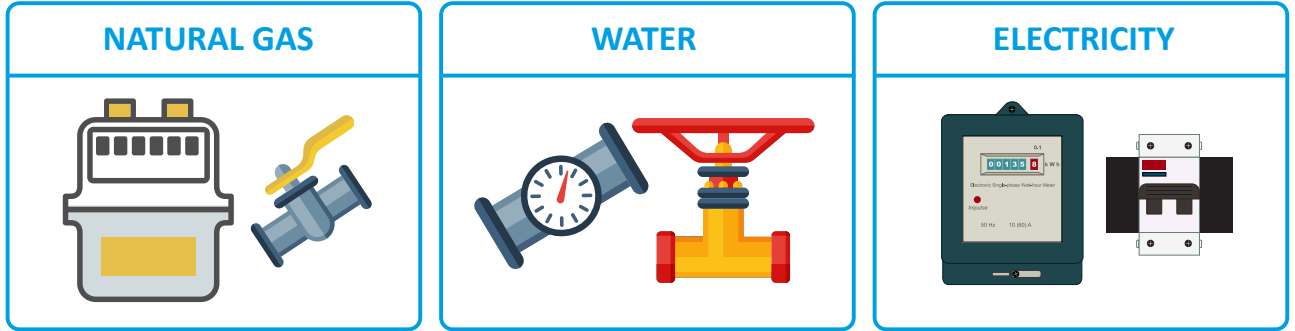
- **Special needs:** a foldable cane, a portable crutch, an oxygen mask, a wheel repair kit if you use a wheelchair, a spare battery for electric wheelchairs etc. depending on your need.

These materials are the recommended content. You can create your kit according to your special needs.

- ◆ Check all items in the disaster and emergency kit periodically and renew if necessary (Renewing water, food and batteries regarding their expiration dates and changing the clothes appropriate to the season).
- ◆ Keep copies of important documents and belongings that water might damage in waterproof bags.
- ◆ When preparing the disaster and emergency kit, make sure it has an appropriate shape and weight, which makes it easy to carry.
- ◆ If the devices and equipment used are of such a size that they cannot be put into the kit, keep them in a safe place and always make sure they stand side by side with the bag.
- ◆ Keep your disaster and emergency kit next to or attached to your walker, wheelchair or electric wheelchair.
- ◆ **Prepare a Personal Evaluation List**
  - Prepare a personal evaluation list that shows the personal skills you can and cannot perform in your daily life and keep your list in your disaster and emergency kit. In this way, after a disaster or emergency, the staff can understand better your needs depending on your disability and intervene more effectively.
  - Identify accessible places in a hotel or asylum centre in your immediate vicinity or outside your area in case of a possible need for temporary accommodation after a disaster.
  - If you are using a tool or device, make sure you have a written document that explains how it works, and if necessary, have contact information of the places it can be obtained from.
  - If you are using an electric wheelchair, also keep a lightweight manual chair in an easily accessible place in case of an emergency. Apart from its size and weight, also make sure that it is portable and foldable.



- Find out where the gas and electricity sources are located in your home and learn how to turn them off. Have the installations made accessible.



- Save the emergency phone numbers on your phone to be able to contact the fire brigade and officers of health, AFAD and police force.
- ◆ **The guide/assistant animals and dogs** are not only companions in daily life, but also in an emergency. The guide/assistant animals can help to safely escape from the danger and to guide the physically disabled individual during evacuation. If you have a guide/ assistant animal;
  - Prepare your disaster and emergency kit according to the care needs of your animal and do not forget to make preparations for them as well..
  - The following list has the basic items that you must have in your kit to meet the needs of your guide/assistant animal or pet in an emergency. As evacuation may be necessary, make sure that your disaster and emergency kit is accessible and easy to carry.

**Emergency kit contents for animals:** Sufficient bottled water, animal food, spoon, a collar and leash, a harness, a blanket and toys, plastic bags, paper towels, bags, sterile gloves, a copy of the report card (ownership information, identity information, veterinary documents), manual tin-opener, medications the animal uses, vitamins, newspapers, a muzzle, masks (against dust and smoke), food and water can, etc.

- These materials are the recommended content. You can make a kit according to your animal's special needs..
- Do not forget to check and renew the items that need changing every 6 months.

- ◆ Remember that pets and guide animals may be confused, scared, or injured during or after a fire. Keep a cage or carrier in an accessible place to transport and evacuate your animals. Do not leave them behind.



Image 5: Emergency kit contents for animals.

## DURING A FIRE

- ◆ If you are exposed to any fire risk;
  - If you see a flame or smoke, if you get the smell of burns, run the alarm immediately within the bounds of possibility by making an alert saying, “There is a fire!” and call the “110 Fire Brigade” immediately.
  - In a widespread fire, leave your place as soon as possible and do not try to put out the fire. However, you can intervene in small fires at their initial phase if you have the opportunity and if you believe you can put them out. Never take a risk that will put your life in danger.

- Use the **PASS** method when using fire extinguishers to intervene in initial fires:



**Image 6:** How to use a fire extinguisher.

- ◆ If you or people in your support network have to intervene in the initial fire; make sure that the extinguishers which are effective from 3-6 metres are sprayed by pointing to the possible burning zone. A fire extinguisher used in a closed environment will slow down the burning and reduce the flame temperature. It will save enough time to leave the place.
- ◆ As mentioned before, the fire should be intervened at the initial phase (i.e. within a minute). After that, the person should shout out “There is a fire” and report the fire within the possibilities (alarm warning systems etc.) and escape to a safe place.
- ◆ The most risky areas where fire is likely to occur in the houses are kitchens (stove and pan fires, ovens, water heaters which are left on, etc.).



- ◆ In the kitchen, if a pan on your stove catches fire, do not panic, and do the following respectively:
  - Turn off your stove,
  - Soak your towel under the tap,
  - Close on the burning pan,
  - Do not move the pan,
  - Never spill water on it.
- ◆ Do not intervene electric fires with water as well.
- ◆ Provide your safety with the evacuation plan you have already prepared and practised. Make sure that evacuation routes are accessible.
- ◆ Try to find alternative routes if the smoke comes from the exit direction or under the door.
- ◆ If the smoke or burning smell comes from another room, test the doors before opening them. Touch the doors with the back of your hand. Do not open the doors if they give you a very warm feeling when you touch them and if you see smoke coming from underneath. Opening the door will cause the fire to grow.
  - If the temperature is normal, open the door slowly, and if there is still smoke, try to move by crawling on the ground to the extent of your ability.
  - During the fire, heavy smoke and poisonous gases accumulate in the ceiling, so crouch down on the floor and crawl to a safe location.
- ◆ Never move away from the wall when you are indoors. Remember that if you move away from the wall in a place with intense smoke, your risk of getting lost is higher. Memorize the location of the exit doors and the items on the exit/evacuation way that you specified on your Disaster Plan. Continue without leaving the wall, and it will direct you to the exit door.
- ◆ If the fire is in the direction of escape, and if you need to open the door and evaluate the size of the fire inside, do not open it completely but only slightly to observe the fire's size. If the fire is not big (life threatening), open the door slightly and move to the nearest exit by leaning on the wall and crouching down, to the extent of your ability.



- ◆ If your clothes are ignited, do not try to run. **STOP** where you are, **DROP** yourself to the floor and **ROLL** on the floor to extinguish the flames, protect your face with your hands.
  - If your clothes catch fire while you are on the wheelchair, drop yourself to the floor and roll to put out the fire.



**SMOKE IS MORE FATAL THAN FIRE.  
GO TO A SAFE EXIT BY CRAWLING.**

**DON'T FORGET** IF YOUR CLOTHES CATCH FIRE; STOP, LIE DOWN, ROLL!

**Image 7:** Things to do if clothes catch fire.

- ◆ In a place with dense smoke, breathe by covering your mouth and nose with a piece of wet wipe or cloth, if possible.
- ◆ If you cannot get out of the building, stay in a position beside a window where you can be seen from outside, and ask for help. Do not take shelter in places such as cupboards or tables.
- ◆ If you have a chance, cover door openings and ventilation holes with a damp cloth to prevent outside smoke from entering.
- ◆ In an emergency, you can use the call button to alert people in your support network at home or at work.



- ◆ If someone else is going to help your evacuation, explain them how to carry your wheelchair, electric wheelchair or walker, and how to carry you fast and safely depending on your disability and health conditions. Give clear, short and precise instructions..

**For example,** “Fold my wheelchair”, “My walker is beside the bed”, “Take my oxygen cylinder”, “Do not carry on your shoulder”.

## AFTER A FIRE

- ◆ Go to the emergency meeting/assembly points already set in your Disaster Plan and wait there.



- ◆ Carry out a condition evaluation;
  - Try to be calm. Evaluate the way you are affected by the fire, your health condition, and the situation around you.
  - Identify your needs, sources and risks while making an evaluation.
- ◆ If you have intervened in a small fire at its initial phase, cool down the area by pouring water to prevent the fire from resurfacing. Open the windows and clean the smoke inside by creating a cross-ventilation.