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# It's Time to Get to Work!

*By Allan B. Fraser, CBI, CPCA, Sr. Building Code Specialist, NFPA*

I was very fortunate to have been a part of several very significant events that were directly related to fire and life safety for people with disabilities, but also encompassed planning and action for fire and life safety for everyone.



*One of the NCD panel discussions with over 475 invited attendees in July.*

This year was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA, which was celebrated in a very big way in Washington D.C. the last week in July. Last spring, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) held three workshops focusing on standards that affect people with disabilities: codes and standards for the built environment, product standards, and emergency evacuations. And in September, FEMA held the 2010 Inclusive Emergency Management National Capacity Building Training Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.



*Richard Devylder, US Department of Transportation in the foreground and Gary Talbot, Assistant General Manager, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority at table in back.*

We are truly becoming inclusive of all peoples with these efforts, but we need to continue the work. Allow me to highlight an area of glaring need: there are no ANSI standards for electric wheelchairs, and they are desperately needed, not just for the health and safety of those who use them, but for everyone who may be in a building with one.

I was surprised to find that motorized wheelchair fires are not unheard of. A motorized wheelchair may be to blame for a Corpus Christi, Texas, house fire that displaced a family of four in July 2010. Fortunately, no one was injured in the blaze.



*An electric wheelchair started a fire on this bus.*

Upon doing some research, I found that the largest maker of battery-operated wheelchairs in the country issued a massive recall of the devices in 2000 because of fires and deaths that occurred when the chair's battery-charger wiring harness short circuited. The recall involved 215,000 motorized wheelchairs, all the units that the manufacturer had made between 1985 and 2000.



*Generic photo of one style of electric wheelchair.*

By the time of the recall, the manufacturer had received reports of 30 incidents and 5 deaths linked to the chairs. According to an engineer who was questioned in one wheelchair fire lawsuit, the chairs lacked a fuse to handle short circuits that would have cost less than \$5.



*Another electric wheelchair that started a fire.*

The manufacturer reportedly had waited years after reports surfaced that some of its wheelchairs were igniting, causing deaths and injuries, before issuing the recall. According to the report, the manufacturer had tracked complaints about problems associated with the battery-charger wiring harness as far back as August 1993.

Other motorized wheelchair manufacturers have had fire problems, too. In 2007, another manufacturer settled a lawsuit for an undisclosed amount with the family of a man who died in 2004. His electric wheelchair caught fire, and both he and the device were engulfed in flames. His daughter was unable to pull him to safety.

It was reported that company knew of at least 18 other fires associated with its wheelchairs and scooters. According to a newspaper report, court records in the case showed that the manufacturer released a new manual in 2006 warning of possible fires during battery recharging.

In the Corpus Christi fire, it was reported that the wheelchair started making popping noises, and the fire spread throughout the living room. The living room was severely damaged, and the rest of the house sustained smoke damage. Two adults and two teens all made it safely out of the house.

In this year of historic events recognizing and celebrating the rights of people with disabilities and encouraging the inclusion of all Americans in everything we do, we can't lose sight of the work still to be done. Developing a standard for electric wheelchairs will significantly reduce the loss of life and property for everyone, not just the users.



*“If you or a loved one uses a motorized wheelchair, please take the time to make sure that the wheelchair, if it is a model listed in a recall, has been inspected by the manufacturer and either repaired or replaced.”*

# Basic Survival Skills

By: *Larry D. Donner, City of Boulder Fire Chief*



Do you know what to do in an emergency? Do you have a backup plan?

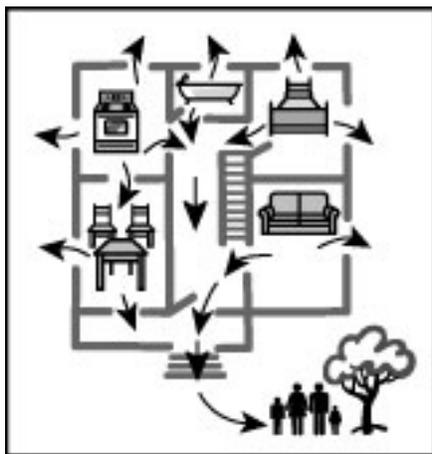
As a fire chief, I advise people to think realistically about the types of emergencies they may face and to develop a plan of action to save themselves, family members, and associates. If your plan is to wait for the fire department to rescue you, you are at risk.

Planning should be an ongoing process. First, think about the types of emergencies you are likely to face. In most cases, planning involves removing yourself from the danger or eliminating the danger itself. I suggest starting with your home.



If you are lucky enough to live in a building with fire sprinklers, you have greatly reduced the danger. If not, you need to think about getting out of harm's way. Remember, your primary access may not be available. In buildings with elevators, for example, you will have to use the stairs, since elevators generally go out of service and drop to the first floor when a fire alarm

activates. Hallways may become impassable due to smoke. You should know two ways out. Discuss your plans with family and friends so they know what to expect and are familiar with their roles in the plan.



Once you have a list of the top one, two, or three “common” emergencies you might have to deal with, you should develop your primary plan with them in mind, as well as one or two backup plans. If you live on the west coast, you should consider earthquakes. In the south east, hurricanes might be an issue. Flooding can be an issue, too, depending on where you live. In most cases, the basic rule still applies: if you cannot eliminate the danger, you need to remove yourself to a place of safety.

I actually suggest taking it a step further. Ask yourself about your time outside your home. Do you have a plan that will keep you safe elsewhere? Take a typical day and journal your activities. Just making the time to think consciously about emergency plans outside the home can save your life.

Once you develop a series of plans for outside the home, it is a small step to develop an ongoing situational awareness to improve your safety. Begin to think like a firefighter and pre-plan your escape routes. You will be more confident and competent should you ever need to use the plan.



Survivors take affirmative action. While emergency service personnel are trained to make rescues, they can only do so in the early stages of an emergency. Firefighters can do the most good for the most people by confining and extinguishing a fire. If a

fire is not stopped early, it continues to grow, exposing more potential victims to danger. If you wait for the firefighters to rescue you and do nothing to help yourself, you no longer control your own fate. You and your preparedness plan are always your best resource in an emergency.

*Chief Donner has more than 38 years in the fire service, including experience as a firefighter, company officer, training chief, fire marshal, and fire chief. He is currently fire chief in Boulder, Colorado.*

## Fire-Safe Travels for Persons with Physical Disabilities

*By: Anne Rader, Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.*



We live in a world where everyone is constantly on the move, going from place to place to attend conferences, participate in business meetings, keep personal appointments, take the kids to one practice or another, while trying to fit in that long-awaited, much-needed vacation. Being mobile and able to travel freely is very important to our daily lives, especially for those of us who have physical disabilities. I am an active business professional with a physical disability and particularly enjoy traveling for pleasure—going around the world touring Renaissance art museums, climbing ancient ruins, skiing Black Diamonds, indulging in the local cuisine, and experiencing different cultures.



The ability to travel safely and securely is always a key concern for me. I have had cerebral palsy since birth and was diagnosed 10 years ago with multiple sclerosis, which affect my walking and balance and require that I use a crutch to walk. I have been hopping trains, planes, and automobiles since childhood, not only to get to and from school, Girl Scouts, and swimming but to travel overseas as an exchange student in high school. Now that I'm an adult, I travel both domestically and internationally to "see the world," as they say, and have encountered situations in which fire-safety practices and procedures were sorely lacking or not even apparent.



*Photo of fire protection devices in a hotel in India. An ABC fire extinguisher, tables for people to climb out and 5 buckets ,2 with water and 3 with sand.*

I often travel alone and realize I am somewhat at greater risk to harm or injury. Almost as though I have a built-in safety card, I am particularly aware of my surroundings from the minute I step out my front door to go to the airport or train station, check into a hotel, visit a museum, or go to a restaurant until I arrive back home—thankfully, always safe and sound. While airlines provide fire and other safety procedure demonstrations before take off, few hotels or inns provide similar instructions when you check in.



When I check into a hotel or bed and breakfast, one of the first things I do is look at the back of the door to see the evacuation route and instructions, which usually are written in such small print you need a magnifying glass to read them. I often wonder what I would do if I were vision-impaired or blind and did not even know those instructions were posted, let alone be able to read them. What if I were in a wheelchair, were a little person, spoke another language, or had difficulty reading and could not read of the instructions on the door due to height or illegibility? How would I know the way out and understand what to do in the event of a fire?

When I travel for pleasure, I prefer to stay in a smaller hotel with some charm or a quaint bed and breakfast with some historic significance. While these are not known for being the most accessible places to stay, I have been lucky to find a fair number of charming, quaint, and historic places that have been modified to be fully accessible. I have been fortunate not to have been in a fire, but I am not shy, and I take it upon myself to offer suggestions to hotel management and staff as to ways—often very simple and inexpensive ways—they can improve their accessibility and, specifically, fire evacuation for persons with disabilities.

A clear example is a trip I took a few years ago to Seattle for a meeting. When it was over, I took a few days to visit Victoria, British Columbia, for pleasure.

Upon arriving on the ferry at Victoria's Inner Harbor, I hopped a cab to my charming little bed and breakfast. It was tucked away from the main harbor area, and its entrance had been modified so it was accessible. Upon checking in, they assigned me to a room on the second floor because that's where their "accessible" room was. Fortunately, I can do stairs, but the room was far from accessible. Besides being on the second floor, its bathroom was a shoebox, although it did have a grab bar in the shower. And the fire evacuation instructions on the back of the door were, as usual, in the same tiny print and posted high on the door.

The next morning when I came down from breakfast, I noted there was a room behind the front desk, so I asked if it were available and accessible. It was neither. When I checked out, I took the opportunity to let the manager know that the room on the first floor should be modified to be the official accessible room, told her how it could be done, and let her know that it would take just a few Canadian dollars to do it. I also told her that she needed a better fire evacuation plan posted more visibly and accessibly in each room.

It is amazing what a simple conversation can do to change the world! The manager completely understood what I was saying, and even though the B&B did not require full accessibility due to its size, she listened to my suggestions and said she would modify the first-floor room so that it was fully accessible and develop a better fire evacuation plan that every guest could read and understand. Whether she realized the liability of the situation or truly wanted to do the right thing, who knows? What matters is that it made a difference in ensuring the safety of all their guests.

This was not the first time I had spoken to a hotel manager about room accessibility and fire evacuation plans. Even with all the laws, regulations, guidelines, and frameworks available to ensure safety for people with disabilities, we still need to educate hotels, motels, inns, and other the hospitality industry venues on how to make travel safe for persons with disabilities. The best way to ensure that we remain mobile and have fun, relaxing, and safe travels is to speak up and let hotel managers, inn keepers, and bed and breakfast owners know what they can do to accommodate travelers with disabilities, ensure their safety while staying at the property, and be sure they return home safe and sound.

*Anne Rader is an associate with Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc. specializing in public health preparedness and emergency response. Ms. Rader has over a 20 year career in public policy, strategic planning, advocacy and management consulting in global health, public health, economic development and education within the private, public and non-profit sectors. She is a former member of the National Council on Disability having been appointed to the Council by President George Bush in 2003 and re-appointed in March 2008. and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for United Cerebral Palsy.*

## Through The Eyes of a Child

*By: Allan B. Fraser, CBI, CPCA Senior Building Code Specialist, NFPA*

I met Utawna Leap and her daughter Lianna Bryant about three years ago and I am honored to have been able to include, and work with, this amazing mother/daughter team, on a number of NFPA accessibility related projects.



“Tawna” and Lianna coordinated a seminar on NFPA’s Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities at Tawna’s alma mater, University of Miami-Ohio. Tawna and Lianna presented an educational session at NFPA’s 2009 Conference and Expo in Chicago on building a fully accessible and fully sprinkered home.

Tawna wrote an article for the December, 2008 issue of e-ACCESS and they were both featured in one of the “cover package” articles in the very well received July/August, 2010 issue of NFPA’s membership magazine “Journal.”



While what follows may not seem directly related to fire and life safety issues, I believe that there is a very clear connection that I’ll continue after you see the linked video. Let me provide some background for what you are about to watch.

Lianna Bryant is an absolutely adorable eight year old with quadriplegic, mixed type cerebral palsy. She needs assistance with even the most simple of tasks and she doesn’t “speak”, at least not in the manner in which most of us would think of as speaking.

For Veteran’s Day, Lianna’s Vice Principal, Mr. Jason Jackson, asked for her to say The Pledge of Allegiance. This is quite an honor as Mr. Jackson is a veteran and served in Iraq. Using her Tobii C12 with CEye, Tawna recorded her and this video will be broadcast on all the TV’s in the new Madison Elementary School. (barring technical difficulties...)

For those of you that are not familiar with the Tobii, it is a very specialized computer that is her “voice” and she controls it with her eyes. “I am so very proud of Lianna”, says Twana.

**[Click here to watch this amazing video.](#)**

Now that you’ve watched the video, can you imagine how this is absolutely a tool for providing Lianna with the ability to communicate, in an emergency, her needs to people who might well include teachers, friends, and first responders in the event her

mother is not there to speak for her? Yes, it is a tool for everyday living, but have you ever thought about what you would do, or how you would communicate with others in the event of an emergency if you suddenly couldn't speak?

I think I've made my point. This technology and this story are directly related to the fire and life safety for many people.



## Another Fire Prevention Week is on the Books

Another Fire Prevention Week has come and gone, and this year's campaign "Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With" proved to be another successful one.

NFPA exceeded its FPW sales goal for 2010.

The FPW blog team shared stories, ideas news and photos through 98 posts. Visits to the blog totaled over 9,800. [Read the closing FPW blog post.](#)



*The FPW blog team included Sharon Gamache, Lynne Winnett, Mike Hazell, Lisa Braxton, Lorraine Carli, Judy Comoletti and Tory Haskell.*

## Marsha Mazz, the Board's New OTIS Director, Receives ANSI Award

Marsha Mazz was recently named Director of the Board's Office of Technical and Information Services (OTIS).



*Marsha Mazz receives the Ronald H. Brown Standards Leadership Award from Michael Brown, son of the late Commerce Secretary.*

A Board employee for over 20 years, Mazz served as the agency's Technical Assistance Coordinator, as well as its liaison to the codes and standards community, and was active in the development of the original ADA Accessibility Guidelines and later supplements to the guidelines. She also led the joint update of the Board's ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines and was instrumental in harmonizing the new document with counterpart codes and standards in the private sector, including the International Building Code (IBC). She succeeds David Capozzi who became the Board's Executive Director in November 2008.



*Marsha Mazz, Bill Scott and Edwina Juillet at ANSI-HSSP Feb. 2009 workshop at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.*

In recognition of her work at the Board, Mazz received the American National Standards Institute's 2010 Ronald H. Brown Standards Leadership Award. Named in honor of the late U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the award recognizes

demonstrated leadership in promoting standardization and eliminating barriers to global trade. The award was presented to Mazz on September 23 during the U.S. celebration of World Standards Day



*NFPA Disability Access Review and Advisory Committee (DARAC) members Rocky Burks, Steve Spinetto and Marsha Mazz at a DARAC meeting in June, 2010.*

This year's theme, "Standards for Accessibility," recognized the critical role model codes and standards play in ensuring access to the built environment, products, technologies, and systems for people with disabilities. Award presenters applauded Mazz for "outstanding contributions to the use of standardization to improve access for persons with disabilities to structures worldwide" and for serving as "a key catalyst of the intensive work over the last two decades to coordinate and harmonize federal criteria for accessibility."

Further information on the award and World Standards Day is available on ANSI's website at [www.ansi.org](http://www.ansi.org).



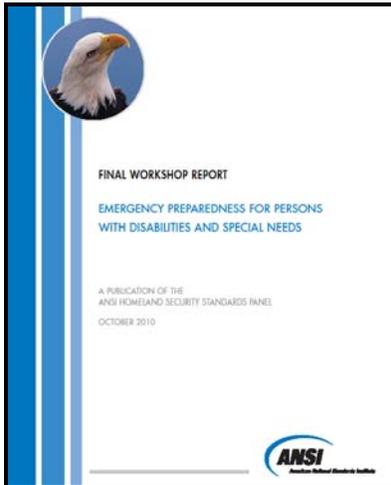
## ANSI Releases Workshop Reports



ANSI would like to thank all those who participated in the 2010 ANSI-HSSP Workshop Series on Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs which included:

- Workshop on Accessibility Codes and Standards, May 24, 2010, Arlington, VA
- Workshop on Standards for Products and Assistive Devices, May 25, 2010, Arlington, VA
- Workshop on Emergency Evacuation Operations, June 17, 2010, New Orleans, LA

The final consolidated workshop report for all three workshops has been published. This workshop report includes recommendations and key resources aimed at producing standards-based solutions for emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities and special needs.



All presentations delivered during the workshop proceedings as well as the final report are available for your viewing by clicking [here](#). ANSI encourages you to send this report to any interested stakeholders that you feel may benefit from its contents.

ANSI would like to thank the workshop leaders Dominic Sims, International Code Council, Chris Dubay, National Fire Protection Association, Gordon Gillerman, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and Allan Fraser, National Fire Protection Association for their leadership and efforts that were essential for keeping this workshop series on track and for the successful delivery of the final report.

Questions and comments can be directed to Karen Hughes, Director of Homeland Security Standards ([khughes@ansi.org](mailto:khughes@ansi.org)) or Jessica Carl, Program Administrator ([jcarl@ansi.org](mailto:jcarl@ansi.org)).





## Justice Department Updates ADA Regulations and Standards

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) released updated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations and standards on July 26, the 20th anniversary of the law's enactment. The rules update requirements for state and local governments covered by title II of the ADA and those for private sector entities subject to Title III. President Barack Obama announced the release along with other administrative initiatives to promote equality for people with disabilities at a ceremony on the south lawn of the White House celebrating the ADA's anniversary.

“Today, the Department of Justice is publishing two new rules prohibiting disability-based discrimination,” the President noted, “and beginning 18 months from now, all new buildings must be constructed in a way that's compliant with the new 2010 standards.”

The DOJ regulations update ADA standards governing the construction and alteration of facilities covered by the ADA, including places of public accommodation, commercial facilities, and state and local government facilities. The new standards are based on revised minimum [guidelines](#) previously established by the Access Board that include supplements for certain types of facilities and sites not addressed before. “For the very first time, these rules will cover recreational facilities like amusement parks and marinas and gyms and golf facilities and swimming pools, and municipal facilities like courtrooms and prisons,” Obama stated.



DOJ's regulations allow covered entities the choice of following either the updated standards or the original standards during the first 18 months. After this period, use of the 2010 standards will become mandatory. In setting the effective dates, DOJ sought to allow sufficient time for transitioning to the updated standards so as not to disrupt design and construction projects already underway. DOJ's new rules also revise or supplement other sections of its ADA regulations, including those covering

existing facilities, service animals, policies and programs, maintenance of accessible features, auxiliary aids and services, and effective communication. The new rules and additional information are available on DOJ's [ADA website](#).

DOJ also initiated new [rulemaking](#) under the ADA to address access to websites, movie theaters, next generation 911 emergency services, and equipment and furniture. In addition, President Obama noted other initiatives to advance equal opportunity for people with disabilities. These include a new executive order establishing the federal government as a model employer of individuals with disabilities; expansion of broadband internet access; creation of new disability offices at the State Department, the Department of Transportation, and Federal Emergency Management Agency; the U.S. signing of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and efforts to improve independent living.



### **Do you have a story to tell or information to share?**

Our readers are people with disabilities, and their relatives, caregivers, and friends.

Our goals are to:

- Provide specialized information about fire and life safety for people with disabilities directly to those with disabilities and to those who assist them to help reduce or eliminate fire deaths and injuries, as well as those resulting from other emergencies, and
- Provide a forum for the collection and dissemination of information for people with disabilities in support of DARAC's mission.
- Provide personal stories about events, ideas or solutions from our readers that can guide others in similar circumstances.

Content for future editions will include:

- NFPA-related news
  - DARAC news
  - NFPA codes- and standards-related information

- Fire safety tips
- Emergency evacuation information
- Articles relating to the safety of people with disabilities from:
  - NFPA staff
  - DARAC members
  - Other national advocates
  - General news
  - Our readers
- Other standards-developing organizations' news
  - U.S. Access Board
  - ANSI/ICC A117, *Standard for Accessible Buildings and Facilities*
  - RESNA
  - U.S. Department of Justice
  - Other

We'd love to hear your stories and opinions! If you'd like to contribute an article or information consistent with the outline above, please e-mail them to Allan B. Fraser, senior building code specialist and *e-Access* coordinator at [afraser@nfpa.org](mailto:afraser@nfpa.org).

## Did You Miss an Issue?



No problem! [You can read the back issues of e-ACCESS by clicking here.](#)