

Accessibility, Emergency Evacuation And The Need To Accommodate The Special Needs Of The Disabled



Qu \acute{e} bec did it first. Manitoba and Ontario did it next. The federal jurisdiction did it a couple of years ago. BC did it last month. And, eventually, every other province and territory will do it as well.

What these jurisdictions all did or will end up doing is adopting accessibility laws requiring owners of public facilities to identify and eliminate barriers that hold back persons with disabilities. Employers and workplaces are among those the accessibility laws cover.

While providing an accessible workplace is largely about architecture, design and employment policies, it also directly affects the OHS program. One notable example is with regard to workplace evacuation and emergency response. You must accommodate the special needs of individuals with mobility, hearing, visual and other forms of impairments and disabilities who may be unable to carry out your evacuation procedures on their own. There are 6 things you must do to meet this challenge:

1. Perform emergency response hazard assessment to identify potential barriers at the site;
2. Assess the emergency response capabilities and needs of disabled workers at the site;
3. Designate monitors or co-workers to assist the disabled during emergencies;
4. Create areas of refuge where the disabled can shelter in place until help arrives;
5. Ensure all workers receive timely instructions in an emergency; and
6. Ensure all workers are capable of carrying out emergency procedures, either with or without assistance.