

Physical Disabilities & Assistive Devices

First Responder Training Video Series—Information Sheet

Provided by the County
of San Diego Office of
Emergency Services

This document provides a brief summary of the information presented in the first responder training video relating to those members of our community who have physical disabilities or use assistive devices.

Understanding types of assistive devices:

- Individuals with physical disabilities may use wheelchairs (both motorized and manual), scooters, walkers, canes, crutches, and service animals.
- Other medical devices may also be used, such as colostomy bags and urinary bags.

Best practices for communicating with individuals with physical disabilities:

- Do not assume limitations that may not be present.
- Clearly explain the situation to them and ask if they would like assistance. They are the best source for sharing what their needs are and how their needs can be met.
- Treat the person the same way you would anyone else; with respect.
- Always use politically correct terminology.

Best practices for handling personal equipment:

- Be mindful of the importance of the mobility device to the individual. If possible, keep mobility devices with the individual. If this is not possible, explain to them when they may be reunited with their equipment. If an individual is not able to be evacuated with their mobility device, clearly explain the situation to them and let them know how they will be moved. If using another piece of equipment to move an individual, such as an evacuation chair, clearly explain how that piece of equipment will be used and ask the individual what may be the best way to transfer them to that device.
- Motorized wheelchairs can be extremely heavy. Moving a motorized wheelchair may require two or more first responders. Always ask the individual how to disengage the wheelchair motor prior to moving the wheelchair.

Special thanks to the following organizations for participating in this video:

Access to Independence of San Diego
San Diego Fire—Rescue

