

## News: Employers risk prosecution over lack of disabled evacuation plans

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As the UK gears up for the Paralympic Games this week, it emerged that around a third of all employers are breaking the law by failing to prepare adequately for workplace evacuations among disabled workers.

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According to a survey of 102 HR directors and managers conducted by emergency evacuation chair manufacturer [Evac+Chair International](#), some 35%



admitted that they had failed to develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan for wheelchair users or mobility-impaired staff, even though it is a requirement under fire safety legislation.

Jim Norman, equality manager at the [Disability Network](#), pointed out that everyone who entered a building had to be able to leave it safely in an emergency in order to assemble at a place of safety.

But the research showed that many disabled workers were "facing discrimination from their employers through their inadequate provision for a safe evacuation. Employers are also failing to comply with fire safety legislation and could face prosecution", he warned.

The study likewise revealed that just under half of those questioned had not purchased the necessary equipment to assist disabled personnel.

Less than 15% of the organisations that had bought the right kit actually bothered to use it during emergency evacuation drills, while 62% hadn't thought of providing staff with the requisite training to use it.

Mark Wallace, Evac+Chair's managing director, said that, even though the Paralympics would hopefully raise the profile of disability in the UK, it was still easy to forget that even simple things such as a flight of stairs could present a huge obstacle for some workers.

"Many employers in the UK still make inadequate provision for disabled staff and this needs to be urgently addressed. Emergency evacuations are a stressful time for everyone involved. However, for mobility-impaired staff, it represents an even greater worry," he continued.

Therefore, in order to reduce stress, employers needed to ensure that all staff were fully trained and competent in using evacuation equipment. "If they are not, then the usefulness of the equipment is nullified," Wallace said.