



# Accessibility Standard for Information and Communications

providing emergency and  
public safety information for  
people with disabilities



## please note:

This guide is not legal advice. If you require assistance in interpreting the legislation or the regulation, please contact your legal adviser. This guide has been created to help you understand the legislation and/or regulation and does not replace the official version of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Ontario Regulation 191/11 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). If there is any conflict between this guide and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation or the AODA, the regulation and the AODA are the final authorities.

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# introduction

Public safety information can help keep people safe when an emergency happens. Ontario's Accessibility Standard for Information and Communications can help you do that by making your emergency and public safety information accessible to people with disabilities. This guide will help you.

**Note:** In this guide we use the term 'customer' to describe any member of the public who has access to an organization's goods, services or premises. Depending on your organization you may use a different term such as client, member, patient, constituent, parishioner, congregant, patron, consumer, third party organization, etc.

## **Quick Fact: What is accessible information?**

You can make a document accessible by recreating it in a different format; for example, printing it in large print for someone with vision loss. This is called an "accessible format."

But you can also make information accessible by helping someone to use the original document or resource; for example, by reading it aloud. This is called a "communication support." Other examples include adding captioning to videos or using written notes to communicate with someone who is hard of hearing.

# does this apply to my organization?

It applies to you if you answer 'yes' to both of these questions:

- Do you have emergency procedures, plans or public safety information?
- Do you make them available to the public?

## what is emergency and public safety information?

There are many types of emergency and public safety information, for example:

- Emergency plans and procedures, such as tour boat instructions on how to use a lifejacket
- Maps, warning signs and evacuation routes, such as a "Warning: High Voltage" sign or a map pointing out emergency exits
- Information you give the public about alarms or other emergency alerts, such as a brochure explaining how a hotel fire alarm works

### **Example**

Patti's wilderness tour takes people on individual hikes, but she reviews emergency procedures, such as what to do if you get lost, in a group setting. Serena has an anxiety disorder and gets anxious in group learning situations. She tells Patti, who offers to go over the procedures with her personally.

# what you need to do

As of January 1, 2012:

- Upon request, make your emergency and public safety information accessible to people with disabilities.
- Work with the person requesting the information to figure out how you can meet their needs, as soon as possible.

You don't have to have accessible formats on hand and you don't have to create new emergency or public safety information. Just make any information that is available to the public accessible, upon request. Real-time emergency information (such as announcements and alarms) isn't included.

## Example

Norman works for a small, family-run motel where the fire escape procedures are posted on the back of every door. When a guest with vision loss asks for this information, Norman talks to the guest about his needs, and walks him through the evacuation procedure.



# steps to consider when providing emergency and public safety information

Making your information accessible doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming – there are lots of ways to do it. These steps may help you get started.

## 1. assess your information

Think about how you provide emergency and public safety information to the public. Focus on things such as evacuation plans, brochures and signs; things that are created before an emergency strikes. Look for potential barriers or anything that would make it difficult for someone with a disability to read, see, hear or understand. For example:

- Someone with vision loss may not see a printed map or warning sign
- If they can't hear the narrator, someone with hearing loss might not understand a video
- Text-heavy emergency guidelines may be hard for someone with a learning disability to understand.

Talk to your customers, staff and people you know who have a disability to help identify possible barriers.

### **Example**

Adil wants everyone to enjoy his theme park safely. He publishes an emergency safety brochure and decides to make several copies in large print. They are available upon request at the park entrance.

### Example

A printing company updated its emergency response plan using standard word processing software. They know that using the software's pre-set styles to format headings and paragraphs makes the document look better and makes it accessible. So they used headings to create a properly formatted table of contents and included descriptive text for the images. When they landed a new client who has vision loss, they gave her the electronic file which works with her screen reader software.

**Tip:** Whenever you create documents, build them as structured electronic files. It's simple to apply a 'style' to titles, headings, etc. and it makes them look better by keeping formatting consistent. If you create all your documents this way, then it's easy to turn them into accessible formats.

For more information on creating a structured electronic file, visit

**<http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>**

## 2. make it accessible upon request

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to providing information accessibly. The law does not specify what format or communication support to use; it's flexible so you can work with the public to determine what they need.

### Example

A property management company gives all new tenants a guide to its emergency procedures. It is large, complex and full of legal language. Cathy has a learning disability and tells her landlord that she doesn't understand it. When the property manager meets with Cathy to go through the procedures, he learns how to make the guide clearer and easier to understand.

What you do will depend on what information you provide, its format and your customer’s individual needs. For example:

<b>Emergency / Public Safety Information</b>	<b>Existing Format</b>	<b>Ways to Make it Accessible</b>
Emergency plan or procedures	Written document, postcard, or brochure	Structured electronic file* [which can be used to produce a web page, large print, Braille*, or audio (DAISY)* version] shared via email so customers can read it with their devices, such as screen readers*
Emergency evacuation maps	Graphic	Tactile map or a written or verbal description of emergency evacuation routes
Danger or warning signs	Signage	Larger text, simple pictures, strong colour contrast, tactile elements
Emergency procedure information	Video	Captioning, transcripts, descriptions, individual presentations
	Orally presented	Real time captioning*, transcript of the presentation, sign language interpreters

\* See Appendix A for more information.

Every organization is different, so do what works best for you and your customer.

### 3. provide it as soon as possible

Emergency and public safety information allows people to plan for emergencies; and people with disabilities may need more time to prepare. Anticipating their need may help you meet requests quickly and demonstrates your commitment to public safety.

Once requested, emergency or public safety information must be provided as soon as possible. How quickly you can provide it may depend on the amount of information, its complexity and the format requested, combined with your organization's resources. In some cases, you may be able to provide accessible formats instantly. In other cases, it may take longer.

#### **Example**

Before customers start to play, Stan's paintball and laser tag company shows a short video on what to do if someone gets hurt. A customer with hearing loss asks for an accessible format, so Stan gives her a transcript of what's said in the video.

# additional resources

- The **Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/ Special Needs** helps people with disabilities prepare for an emergency. It also includes tips for helping people with disabilities in an emergency situation and a list of emergency and disability related organizations. Visit **emergencymanagementontario.ca** and click “special needs”.
- **Accessible Information and Communication: A Guide for Small Business** provides a comprehensive overview of how to provide information in accessible formats at **www.gaates.org/aic/**.
- The **Accessible Digital Office Document Project** is a one-stop shop for creating accessible digital documents using today’s most popular office applications (Microsoft, OpenOffice, iWork, Corel, GoogleDocs, etc.) at **http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/**.
- Learn more about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and find free tools and templates at **ontario.ca/AccessON**.
- Contact your local fire department or organizations that help people with a specific type of disability.

# Appendix A:

## ways to make information accessible

**American Sign Language (ASL):** ASL uses hand shapes, positions, facial expressions, and body movements to convey meaning to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

**Braille:** Braille is a tactile system of raised dots representing letters or a combination of letters. It is used by people who are blind or deafblind and is produced using Braille transcription software.

**Captioning:** Captioning uses subtitles to convey the words spoken in a video. They usually appear on the bottom of the screen.

**Digital Accessible Information Systems (DAISY):** DAISY is an audio format for people who have trouble with print – including limited vision and learning disabilities like dyslexia. DAISY digital talking books are like audiobooks, but include navigation features to help readers skip forward or back through the material.

**Screen Reader Software:** Screen readers use a speech-synthesizer to read text from a computer screen or convert it to Braille. The information must be formatted properly (in a structured electronic file) for the screen reader to recognize it.

**Structured Electronic Files:** A structured electronic file includes information about how elements of the document are formatted, like titles, section headings, etc. They can be created using “styles” in most standard word processing programs. Documents created as structured electronic files are easier to convert to accessible formats (including Braille, DAISY and web pages) and allow screen readers to navigate the information effectively.