ABSTRACT

In studying the capabilities of persons with disabilities in the engagement of evacuation activities, Shields (1996) considered five disability types, namely hearing, seeing, locomotion, dexterity/strength and mental, to be relevant to an individual’s ability to evacuate during emergencies. This research considers the effect each of these bodily limitations has on one’s evacuation capabilities, and highlights how the existing life safety provisions in public facilities might not be adequate to attend to such special needs. In parallel, an audit conducted among local buildings and their management, complemented further by survey findings from building users with some forms of disability, revealed a general lack of attention paid on aspects of management procedures, staff training, occupant preparedness and design pertaining to the evacuation of these people. This implies that while the issue of ‘equal accessibility’ for people with disabilities in buildings has been advocated in recent times, that of ‘equal egressibility’ is often not. Meanwhile, available escape technologies recommended in other parts of the world and introduced in this study attracted positive responses from both the potential users and fire safety personnel, hinting at their usefulness in enhancing the safety of persons with disabilities in buildings. Also, it was found that the government and its agencies, professional institutions, disability organisations as well as the education sector could play more active roles in the promotion of an inclusively safe built environment.

Keywords: Evacuation, persons with disabilities, elderly people, public buildings