

Updated guidelines help clarify requirements for restrooms

Since 1990 when the **Americans with Disabilities Act** became law, many barriers have been removed to give individuals with disabilities greater access to public facilities. Title III of the guidelines states that facilities like restaurants and hotels may not discriminate on the basis of disability.

While many hospitality facilities have the best of intentions for providing full and equal access to those with disabilities, thousands have been sued by individuals or groups seeking damages for ADA violations. ADA litigation has been a profitable business against the

hospitality industry, particularly in California, Florida and Hawaii in the last decade. Most business owners would have made the simple and relatively inexpensive changes to resolve the problems, if only they had known.

From a plumbing pipe left unwrapped to mirrors mounted too high, restrooms tend to cause a significant amount of confusion when it comes to accessibility. Making technical mistakes cannot only make it difficult for visitors using restrooms, they could also be costly. That's why it's so important for designers, specifiers and building owners to have a working

knowledge of the standards to create restrooms that are not only attractive and durable, but also ADA-compliant.

There are a number of key elements of accessibility within the toilet room - accessible route, wheelchair turning space, reach ranges and protruding objects. It's important to know that products are not ADA certified, but manufacturers do offer an array of plumbing products to help facilities comply.

ADA and the hospitality industry

In July 2004, the U.S. Access Board released new **ADA Access Guidelines** to improve compliance and access, align with the Architectural Barriers Act and make the guidelines more consistent with the International Building Code and other industry standards, such as the American National Standards Institute. The new guidelines should clarify requirements for new hotel and motel construction.

The hospitality industry has frequently been cited for barriers in public restrooms and bathrooms in guestrooms, as well as other violations, such as having an inadequate number of accessible rooms by rate or location, lack of



This is an ADA-compliant washroom at a Walt Disney World venue where trash cans were integrated into the lavatory units.

devices for the hearing impaired and improper signage. In fact, the Department of Justice has a checklist on its Website to help those in the hospitality industry avoid common ADA violations.

According to the DOJ, mistakes at lodging facilities are often a result of mistakes made during the construction-planning phase. Local officials review the construction plans to make sure that state and local building and fire code requirements are met, but they are not authorized to enforce federal laws like the ADA and, consequently, do not review building plans for ADA mistakes. A solution for preventing these problems is to enlist a local ADA consultant to review plans before construction starts.

A closer look at the guidelines

ADA guidelines ensure that guests with disabilities can reserve an accessible room. To achieve that goal, lodging properties must provide a certain number of accessible rooms, and facilities with 50 or more guestrooms must also provide wheelchair-accessible showers. For instance, a hotel with 150 rooms must have at least five accessible rooms plus an additional two accessible rooms with roll-in showers for a total of seven rooms (see Figure 1). Section 608 of the ADAAG provides the dimensions and includes figures to illustrate the requirements for standard and alternate roll-in type shower compartments.

To make washing easier for all users, the ADAAG has more specific requirements for showers. In the past, a shower spray unit with hose at least 60 inches long had

to be installed, and it could be used either as a fixed shower head or hand-held shower. Under the updated requirement, a shower spray unit with a hose at least 59 inches long must be provided that can be used as a fixed-position shower head and hand-held shower. If an adjustable-height shower head on a vertical bar is used, the bar cannot obstruct the use of grab bars.

In addition, the shower spray unit must have an on/off control with a non-positive shut-off, and



This is a multi-height lavatory system in use.

the shower water temperature cannot exceed a maximum of 120°F. Thermostatic mixing valves or pressure-balancing valves can be installed to ensure that water does not exceed this temperature. These valves blend hot and cold water to a maximum setting to prevent scalding. A pressure-balancing valve will hold outlet temperature if the incoming pressure changes. A thermostatic valve will also respond to pressure changes and will hold outlet temperature should the incoming hot or cold

water temperature change.

Accessible handwashing

There are a number of specific requirements that impact handwashing areas of the restroom including clear floor space, counter surface, rim height and clear knee and toe space. Faucets, mirror height and other factors must also be factored.

If there is hot water supplied to a sink, plumbing pipes under the lavatory must be wrapped or protected to prevent users from burning their legs. Along those same lines, there cannot be any sharp edges. Before the latest updates, lavatories were simply required to provide a minimum of 29 inches of knee clearance. This no longer applies. In its place is a broader clarified knee and toe clearance requirement that also covers other building elements such as tables and counters as part of section 306 in the ADAAG baseline requirements.

To ensure that users can reach faucet controls and the sink, for adults, the top of the lavatory cannot be higher than 34 inches above the floor. There are more specifics such as a maximum depth that

knee clearance can extend under an object (see Figure 2). Be sure to review all of the guidelines.

No more than one bowl of a multi-bowl sink is required to provide minimum knee and toe clearances. In public restrooms, rather than installing a separate lower sink that meets the ADA guideline, designers should consider new lavatory systems with fully-integrated sinks at varying heights. These multi-height lavatory systems simplify the task of meeting height requirements by combining