

Designing ADA-Compliant Restrooms for Hospitality Facilities



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The recent surge of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) litigation against the hospitality industry by individuals and disability rights groups have many owners and operators concerned about potential ADA claims. Under Title III of the ADA, public facilities such as restaurants, hotels and shopping centers may not discriminate on the basis of disability. In most cases, owners do not believe they are in violation and think that they are providing full and equal access to those with disabilities – until they are sued.

Restrooms tend to cause a significant amount of confusion when it comes to accessibility – from bathroom doors to reaches and clearances. The goal is obviously to make restrooms appealing for visitors, but also durable enough to withstand high use and, sometimes, abuse. Manufacturers offer an array of plumbing products for hospitality applica-

tions that meet accessibility standards, but specifying products is only part of the equation. In order to create an ADA-compliant restroom, engineers and designers must have a working knowledge of the standards.

The key elements of accessibility within the “toilet room” are the following: an accessible route, wheelchair turning space, clear floor space for wheelchairs, reach ranges and protruding objects. While we cannot address all of these issues, here is some additional background on ADA compliance and how the requirements impact restroom design.

ADA Updates

In July 2004, the U.S. Access Board released new ADA Access Guidelines (ADAAG) to improve compliance and access, align with the Architectural Barriers Act and make the guidelines more consistent with the International Building Code (IBC) and other industry standards such as those of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

The updated ADAAG will probably most significantly affect new hotel and motel construction. In the past, these facilities have frequently been cited for barriers in public restrooms and guestroom bathrooms, as well as for other violations, including having an inadequate number of accessible rooms by rate or location, lack of devices for the hearing impaired and improper signage. The Department of Justice has a checklist on its Web site to help those in the hospitality industry avoid common ADA violations.

In hotels, ADA guidelines help to ensure that disabled guests can reserve an accessible room. A property with 150 rooms, for example, must have at least five accessible rooms. Section 608 of the guidelines provides the dimensions and includes figures to illustrate the requirements for standard and alternate roll-in type shower compartments.

One ADAAG change that impacts buildings with shower units and shower stalls, such as hotels, is the requirement for the shower spray unit. Previously, ADA stipulated that a shower spray unit with a hose at least 60 inches long that could be used as a fixed showerhead or hand-held shower be installed. Under the updated requirement, a shower spray unit with a hose a minimum of 59 inches long that can be used as a fixed-position showerhead and a hand-held shower must be provided. If an adjustable-height showerhead on a vertical bar is used, the bar cannot obstruct the use of grab bars.

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In addition, the shower spray unit must have an on/off control with a non-positive shut-off, and the shower water temperature cannot exceed a maximum of 120°F. Thermostatic mixing valves (TMVs) 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, such as 110°F, 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, in addition, will hold outlet temperature should the incoming hot or cold water temperature change.

Lavatories and sinks

There are a number of very specific ADA requirements for installing lavatories - clear floor space, counter surface, rim height and clear knee and toe space. Beyond knee and toe clearance, piping under lavatories must be protected or wrapped to keep users from burning

themselves if hot water is supplied. There also cannot be any sharp edges, and faucet controls must be accessible.

In the past, lavatories were required to provide at least 29 inches of knee clearance. This has been replaced with a clarified knee and toe clearance requirement that applies across other elements such as tables and counters as part of section 306, the baseline requirements.

The maximum depth that knee clearance can extend under an object has been increased from 19 inches to 25 inches. When knee clearance is required under an object for clear floor space, it should be a minimum of 11 inches deep at nine inches above the floor, and a



Photo courtesy of Bradley Corp.

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minimum of eight inches deep at 27 inches above the floor. For adults, the top of the lavatory cannot be higher than 34 inches above the floor. The new ADA includes limited dimensional requirements for fixtures used primarily by children; prior standards were only advisory. Be sure to review the ADAAG for all of the toe and knee clearances.

The ADAAG has added that no more than one bowl of a multi-bowl sink is required to provide minimum knee and toe clearances. New solid surface, multi-height lavatory systems are designed to be universal for all users and are an attractive way to meet codes. The units simplify the task of meeting ADA height requirements by offering multi-height lavatories all in one unit - from one to three user stations. Some have an interesting wave design that combines a lower ADA-compliant sink with a higher sink, making it ideal for washrooms in restaurants, bars, hotel lobbies and fitness centers.

An added benefit of these fixtures is that the solid surface finish is a good choice aesthetically. Solid surface materials can be selected in a range of color options, many of which have natural-looking textures or chunks of aggregate that give them an appearance similar to that of granite. The continuous bowl is easy to clean, and the surface resists burns, impact, chemicals, and graffiti and can be easily repaired, if necessary.

Faucets

Lavatory and sink faucet controls are another restroom component that must be accessible. Faucets must be mounted to ADA-compliant lavatories for the age group that will primarily use the facility.

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