

Avoid Common Oversights that Violate the ADA

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Where do owners, developers, architects, and other key professionals go wrong when it comes to compliance with the ADA? For the most part, many assume that plan approvals by building departments are a guarantee of compliance. What they do not realize is that building departments assess building code compliance, not compliance with federal laws, including the ADA.

Inspections of properties cited in cases against owners of lodging facilities have revealed common oversights. These oversights are usually the result of the misunderstanding or misapplication of technical guidelines developed to ensure access for people with disabilities. The following are a few of the more common oversights.

Excessive Running and Cross Slopes

Running slope is measured parallel to the direction of travel; cross slope is measured perpendicular to the direction of travel. The cross slope of an accessible route must be no more than 2 percent, which is relatively flat. Typically, extreme cross slope occurs at where the route along the sidewalk continues across the slope of the curb ramp. In this case, the running slope of the curb ramp, which is permitted to be up to 1:12 (8.33 percent), is also the cross slope of the accessible route across curb ramp. Providing a pathway around the top of the curb ramp so that a person is not required to negotiate across the slope of the curb ramp is one way to eliminate this common oversight.

The running slope of an accessible route should be kept as low as possible to provide easy access. Accessible routes which slope up to 1:20 (5 percent) are referred to as "walks" and those which slope between 1:20 (5 percent) and 1:12 (8.33 percent) are considered "ramps." Remediation of excessive running slopes can be extremely expensive, including provisions for additional accessible by-pass routes or removing and replacing steep routes where a by-pass route is not possible.

Steeply Sloping Curb Ramps and Gutters

Noncompliant curb ramps are by far one of the most prevalent conditions found during a site inspection. Curb ramps are subject to a number of criteria,

including running slopes which do not exceed 1:12 (8.33 percent) and cross slopes which do not exceed 2 percent. For the most part, remediation often requires removal and replacement of the curb ramp.

Hazards Created by Protruding Objects

Objects which protrude from walls can be extremely hazardous for people with visual disabilities. Wall-mounted objects, such as lighting, which are installed lower than 80 inches and more than 27 inches above the finished floor must not project more than 4 inches into the circulation path. Typical fixes include replacing features with similar low-profile models or providing a permanent cane-detectable barrier the hazardous object.

Controls Located Out of Reach Range

Features intended to be used by guests must be located within accessible reach range. It is not uncommon to find light switches, outlets and other operable parts which are out of reach. Remediation almost always involves relocating operable parts within accessible reach range.

Clear Width at Doors of Less than 32 Inches

All doors which are meant for user passage within all guestrooms are required to provide a clear opening width of no less than 32 inches. It is not uncommon to find doors within guestrooms which do not provide proper clear width, especially those doors between connecting rooms. Remediation, in most cases, involves removing and replacing the door and associated buck.

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