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Ensuring your facility is ADA compliant

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Ever since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect on January 26, 1992, it has dramatically improved the lives of disabled individuals by working to make all public places in the United States both accessible and hospitable to those with disabilities. But even though the ADA has greatly helped in achieving a better quality of life for disabled people over the past 17 years, the changes didn't happen overnight, and are, in fact, still underway today.

It's important to realize that ADA compliance is a process, with requirements that must be considered on an ongoing basis. Here are a few guidelines:

Parking

One of the most recognizable hallmarks of the Americans with Disabilities Act, designated handicapped, or accessible, parking is a key convenience for disabled people who aren't able to traverse moderate to long distances through parking lots. Whether you're constructing a new facility or currently occupy one that hasn't been fully updated to ADA standards, be sure that your parking area meets the following guidelines:

*To determine how many parking spaces should be designated for disabled clients, customers, or employees, consider the total number of parking spaces your facility has. The general rule of thumb is that 1 parking spot in every group of 25 or fewer spaces needs to be handicapped-accessible. That would mean dedicating 1 accessible spot per every 25 or fewer spaces, 2 accessible parking spaces for lots ranging from 26-50 spaces, etc...

*Each accessible parking space must be marked with a sign bearing the international symbol of accessibility.

*Accessible parking spaces should be the ones closest to a wheelchair-accessible entrance, and be located on level ground that is free from potentially dangerous sloping.

*Accessible parking spaces should be bordered on the right or left by a clearly marked access aisle, which allows disabled individuals plenty of room to enter and exit their vehicle, and comfortably transition to a wheelchair or other mobility device. Access aisles for van-accessible spaces should be at least 8 feet wide, while those adjacent to car-accessible spaces should be 5 feet in width.

*A flat, stable, slip-resistant, stair-free accessible route must lead from each access aisle to the nearest accessible building entrance. If the access route must cross through an area with vehicular traffic, a marked crosswalk should be provided.

Entrances

The most vital element of an ADA-compliant facility is an accessible entrance, without which many disabled people would be prevented from entering your business or facility. One of the key actions in creating an accessible entrance is to remove any and all stairs leading either up or down to entrances - even a single shallow step can be enough to discourage, or make impossible, the entry

a person who is wheelchair-bound or has other mobility limitations. Here are some additional guidelines to follow in the creation of accessible entrances:

*If your facility has more than one entrance, they don't all have to be accessible. However, all non-accessible entrances must have clear signage directing the way to the nearest accessible entrance.

*In multi-entrance facilities, accessible entrances must be left open or unlocked during business hours. If an accessible entrance needs to be kept locked because of security concerns relating to its location, it must be equipped with an intercom or doorbell so that staff can be made aware when someone needs to use the entrance. In such cases, the intercom, buzzer or bell needs to be mounted at accessible level, no more than 4 feet above the ground.

*The removal of steps generally results in the installation of ramps or lifts. If you'll be replacing steps with a ramp, the ramp should have as shallow a slope as possible, never exceeding a rise/run ratio of 1:12.

*If the slope of a ramp is 1:20 or steeper and its total vertical rise exceeds 6 inches, the ramp must be equipped with handrails, both for the stability of those traversing the ramp, and to prevent people from falling off - or rolling over - the edge.

*If possible, grade the ground adjacent to a ramp to match the ramp's slope - this prevents steep drop-offs, and increases the overall safety of the ramp.

*All accessible ramps must be a minimum of 36" wide.

*Don't overlook door hardware. Any type of door handle that requires tight grasping, twisting, or use of a thumb-latch can present an entry obstacle, particularly for people with mobility issues or arthritis. Lever and loop handles are the easiest types for everyone to use, and are excellent choices for accessible entrance hardware.

*Large stores, entertainment venues, and other facilities equipped with turnstiles and/or security gates should be built or modified so that people who use wheelchairs, canes, crutches or walkers can easily enter and exit. Suitable options include removing a turnstile, implementing an accessible turnstile, or providing an accessible gate adjacent to existing standard turnstiles.

Cord Covers and Ramps

Ramps may play a key role in creating accessible entrances, but they're also an appropriate, and often necessary, means of helping those with disabilities to safely and successfully cross ground and floor obstructions like cables, hoses and air lines. In cases where such objects need to be routed across halls, pathways, and other public-access areas of your facility, maintain ADA-compliance in the following ways:

*Cover extension cords, data cables and hoses with a low profile, heavy-duty cord cover that complies with ADA standards, such as the Guard Dog 5-Channel Low Profile Cord Protector.

*If the low profile cord protectors mentioned above aren't appropriate for your application, use standard heavy-duty polyurethane cord protectors that can be connected to ADA-compliant ramps. We recommend gently sloping, slip-proof Cross-Guard Access Ramps, which easily connect to several different types of cord covers, and can be fitted with an optional ADA-compliant side rail system added safety.

*In instances where handrail assistance may be needed, rail barriers can be added to ADA-Compliant crossings over cables and hoses.

For a complete list of ADA compliance guidelines, please see the US Department of Justice's ADA

Standards for Accessible Design.

Christina Hansen is a Product Specialist at CableOrganizer.com - a leading eTailer of cable, wire and equipment management solutions including those assuring ADA compliance. She may be reached through the company's Web site located at <http://CableOrganizer.com>.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540