

*Interior Renovations:
New Uses for Old Spaces*

STUMPTOWN N°12



Improving our Industry

BIFMA to launch a branded conformance program

At this past NeoCon, some of the industry buzz was around BIFMA's announcement that it will launch BIFMA Compliant, a branded conformance program that launches next year. The program is being developed in response to what BIFMA have heard from the design community and many others connected to the furniture selection and procurement process. "It's a tool that will benefit everyone with a vested interest in ensuring that furniture used in commercial environments is safe and the wellbeing of the users for the entire time it is in use," says Tom Reardon, executive director of BIFMA. Curious, we spoke to Reardon about why he felt the need for the new program, how BIFMA is addressing the need for standards for furniture for amenity spaces, and how this program will address the current needs of the architecture and design community.

Why did you feel the need to develop this program? What are the technological and societal shifts that you identified that in turn made you realize you needed to develop this program?

We are experiencing tremendous change in the environments where we work, learn, and heal. It is very exciting and the future is bright as evidence-based design influences the creation of better spaces and technology advancements allow increasingly more choice. Amidst all the change, BIFMA has a role to play as a trusted advisor related to the furniture. We recognized the need for a simple tool whereby conformance with BIFMA's safety and performance standards could be easily identified by a specifier or purchaser.

It used to be that standards were most needed for chairs, but now we're seeing the rise of furniture for amenity spaces, and a lot crossing over from the residential sector. How do you see BIFMA addressing this?

BIFMA has a standard for chairs for sure. In fact, we have five different seating standards that cover the array of seating from heavy duty use that you might see in an airport, for example, to lighter expected use in amenity spaces. But we also have standards for other major product categories, including storage, desks, tables, and systems. And the cross-over of furniture from the residential sector is one of those dynamics that further drove the need to clearly identify and distinguish products that conform to BIFMA standards from those that do not.

BIFMA has been developing safety and performance standards for over 45 years. For example, in 2009 you launched LEVEL which was a sustainability certification program. How do you see your new program addressing the needs of the A and D community today. What has changed?

LEVEL was important for BIFMA in that it marked the first time we developed a certification program for one of our standards; in this case, the

BIFMA COMPLIANT

ANSI/BIFMA e3 Furniture Sustainability Standard. The LEVEL certification program is stronger than ever with over 4600 products listed on <http://www.levelcertified.org/> and a comprehensive update to the standard that was just published in February of 2019. All of the BIFMA standards are voluntary so apart from a program like LEVEL and now BIFMA Compliant, there hasn't been an easy mechanism for design professionals to know if the furniture products they are recommending to their clients have been tested for safety, performance or sustainability. What has changed is our engagement with the architecture and design community, which has allowed BIFMA to have a dialogue and to better respond to their needs. And it's not only design practitioners who are asking for this assurance. The array of professionals who may have some influence on the furniture that ultimately ends up in a commercial environment is only growing. As we engage with all these influencers, we consistently hear the request for a mechanism to reliably identify products that conform to BIFMA standards.

Can you give us an example or two of how this program will better serve the needs of the industry and the public?

Take, for example, the General Services Administration (GSA) who are responsible for procuring furniture for the nation's largest purchaser of it—the Federal Government. Many of your readers will be familiar with the importance of being listed on the GSA schedule as a pre-requisite for competing for these contracts. Conformance to the relevant BIFMA safety and performance standard has long been among the criteria required in order to be listed, but enforcement of this has been a challenge for GSA. We can say with confidence that the GSA is very supportive of BIFMA Compliant.

I mentioned our outreach to the design community. A relationship we have with HOK, one of the largest global architectural, design, and engineering firms led to a collaboration in developing specification language that they will use with clients related to furniture product conformance with the BIFMA standards. They see this as an important level of professionalism that they bring to the practice of design, which also ensures that their clients are not exposed to unnecessary risk.

There are so many labeling programs today, how do you feel this program will be different?

BIFMA Compliant emerged from the voice of the market asking us to do this. You mentioned already that BIFMA has been around for more than 45 years. In that time, we have gained the trust of the market when it comes to commercial furniture, something we do not take lightly. That said, we also know that we need to design our program for an excellent user experience, which translates to intuitive, easy, and fast. The BIFMA Compliant Registry will be easily accessed from the BIFMA home page (<https://www.bifma.org/>). But BIFMA Compliant products will also be readily identified on other platforms that designers and specifiers are already using. As well, our

members—who are developing all this amazing product—will be able to promote their BIFMA Compliant products with easily identified branding.

Will there be a logo so that end users can see if furniture is compliant or will there be other ways of addressing the need for better understanding this new program.

Yes, on both counts. BIFMA Compliant will be a branded program with a logo that is easily identified and associated with BIFMA. We will be out in the market talking about it as part of our ongoing outreach and educational initiatives. Anyone who has met the criteria for the program is encouraged to use the branded materials to communicate to their customers. BIFMA will maintain the Registry of all products in the program and it will be the official place to search for products and take the deeper dive to learn more. To learn more about BIFMA Compliant right now and to stay up to date, simply click the Compliant logo on our home page.

Traditionally BIFMA's standards have been open to BIFMA members and non-members alike. Will this program be open to non-members? Why do you feel the need to do this?

Yes, the program will be open to both members and non-members, but will feature preferred pricing for members. BIFMA is a not-for-profit organization representing the interests of the industry at large. We have an important role related to the commercial built environment and safety certainly falls under this umbrella. Our primary members are companies that manufacture commercial furniture. We provide unique services to our members to help them make better business decisions, but not everyone with a vested interest in furniture is eligible for membership. BIFMA Compliant, like LEVEL that came before it, are examples of where our expertise overlaps with meeting a market need. We are happy to step into the role of meeting this need for the benefit of all who occupy spaces to work, learn, and heal.

How do you see architects and designers interface with this new program?

Our goal is to have BIFMA Compliant product information included wherever architects, designers, and clients are already going to make their furniture selections. This may be a manufacturer's website or through their representatives, product selection tools such as My Resource Library or Designer Pages, or databases such as those used by institutional buyers like the GSA. As we forge these relationships—and as the official, one-stop for verification—the BIFMA Compliant Registry will be maintained by BIFMA and will be the comprehensive product listing resource.

When does BIFMA Compliant launch?

It is set to launch in October 2020. We are already working behind the scenes to construct the platform, get products loaded, and develop all the support materials to ensure that at launch, this program will be robust, reliable, and ready to go!