

Accessible To All

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Identifying the ADA focus points in restaurants

New technology and services allow those with disabilities to lead independent and productive lives, providing them with the same access as everyone else. That includes being able to enjoy a meal at a restaurant. This is where your restaurant's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements can mean the difference between a great night out or frustration and disappointment for a customer—and maybe even a lawsuit for you.

Let's review the ADA. It is a federal civil rights law that prohibits the exclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

Businesses are legally obligated to remove physical barriers that are readily achievable. This means you must make accommodations; the extent and expense of what must be done depends on the size of your restaurant and the date it was built or modified. This is an ongoing obligation, not a "once and done" requirement. Yearly re-evaluation of accessibility is imperative. Something that may not be readily achievable now may be later on.

While the ADA is designed for people with disabilities, the accommodations also benefit other groups, such as customers with balance issues and temporary medical limitations, seniors and users of mobility equipment.

Let's walk through a typical visit for a customer, identifying the ADA focus points.

PARKING LOTS

The minimum number of accessible parking spaces is based on the parking lot's size (ref: 208.2). At least one van-accessible space must be provided for every six accessible spaces. Accessible parking spaces are 8 feet wide; van-accessible spaces are 11 feet wide. Access aisles for either type of space are 5 feet wide. All spaces must be clearly labeled and marked.

TRAVEL ROUTES

Clear and well-marked access to your facility from the parking lot is required. Curb ramps offer ready access. If the only parking available is on a city street, and the business does not own or control the sidewalk, the municipality, not the restaurant, is responsible for providing curb ramps. If a restaurant owns or controls the sidewalk, it must provide curb ramps if readily achievable. If a restaurant is a tenant, responsibility for providing curb ramps rests with both the landlord and the tenant. This should be specified in the lease agreement.

ENTRANCES AND ACCESS ROUTES

At least one entrance (preferably the main entrance) must be accessible so customers can get through the door. The running slope of walking surfaces shall not be steeper than 1:20. The cross slope of walking surfaces shall not be steeper than 1:48 (ref: 403.3).

The clear width of walking surfaces shall be 36 inches minimum (ref: 403.5). Clear width at turns must be maintained. Where the accessible route makes a 180-degree turn, it must be less than 48 inches wide. The clear width shall be 42 inches minimum approaching the turn, 48 inches minimum at the turn and 42 inches minimum leaving the turn. Accessible passing spaces must be either a space 60x60 inches minimum or an intersection of two walking surfaces that provides a T-shaped space complying with section 304.3.2, where the base and arms of the T-shaped space extend 48 inches minimum beyond the intersection.

DOORS

Door openings shall provide a clear width of 32 inches minimum. For interior use, they must be push or pull to open with a maximum of 5 pounds of force. The operable parts should be mounted at 34 inches to 48 inches above the finished floor. This includes restroom stall doors.

SEATS, TABLES AND COUNTERS

If a cash register is at the sales or service counter, an accessible counter must be located close to the cash register so a person using a wheelchair is visible to sales or service personnel and to minimize reach. Pathways and access routes must make it possible for customers to reach seating and counters. The tops of dining counters must be 28 to 34 inches above the floor.

RESTROOMS

If restroom facilities are provided for public use, at least one accessible restroom must be available when readily achievable. The route to the restrooms should also be accessible. There must be a clear path to the restroom. In addition to the stall, access to other amenities and minimizing hazards is important.

Accessible restroom stall handles—lever or loop handles—must be able to be operated with a closed fist. Stalls must have at least a 5x5- foot area for wheelchairs.

Lavatory mirrors and counters must be installed with the bottom edge of the reflecting surface 40 inches above the finished floor. A single full-length mirror meets requirements.

Soap dispenser mounting height is 44 inches above the finished floor with a reach depth of 11 inches. Paper towels, hand dryers and waste receptacles are recommended to have the operable part at 40 inches above the finished floor.

Undercut toilet bowls are recommended and flush levers must be located on the open side of the toilet and not interfere with the grab bars. Seat height must be 17 to 19 inches above the finished floor. Grab bars must be 1.25 to 2 inches in diameter and installed between 33 and 36 inches above the floor. Accessories must be located on the side wall or partition nearest the toilet and openings must be

between 18 and 48 inches above the finished floor with the exception of toilet paper dispensers that should be mounted no lower than 15 inches.

Consider wrapping hot water pipes if they are exposed beneath the counter. Customers in wheelchairs could burn their legs while using the sink.

Lastly, to assist businesses with complying with the ADA, Section 44 of the IRS Code allows a tax credit for small businesses and Section 190 of the IRS Code allows a tax deduction for all businesses.

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