

How to Achieve and Maintain ADA Compliance

EVER SINCE THE AMERICANS with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect in 1992, it has dramatically improved the lives of disabled individuals by working to make all public places in the U.S. 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.

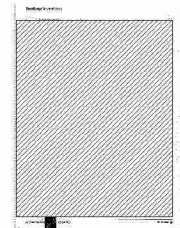
"It's important to realize that ADA compliance is a process with requirements that must be considered on an ongoing basis," said Christina Hansen of CableOrganizer Inc., a consultant group specializing in ADA and OSHA guidelines and a provider of equipment management solutions.

The areas convenience store and petroleum operators need to be concerned about most include parking spaces, front-door access and wheelchair ramps. Facilities that are not compliant face stiff fines and could even be shut down for repeat offenses.

PROMOTE PARKING

One of the most recognizable hallmarks of the disabilities act designated that handicapped 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, Hansen offered these tips to ensure parking areas meet ADA 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 one parking spot in every group of 25 or fewer spaces needs to be handicapped-accessible.
- 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.
- "The 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," Hansen said. Access aisles for van-accessible spaces should be at least eight feet wide, while those adjacent to car-accessible spaces should be at least five 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.





Retail stores must comply with the Americans with Disability Act, which requires designated parking and wheelchair access for customers with disabilities. Failure to comply with the law could result in hefty fines.

ENTRANCES AND EXITS

The most vital element of an ADA-compliant facility is an accessible entrance, without which many disabled people would be prevented from entering a 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 tips to follow in the creation of accessible entrances:

- If a facility has more than one entrance, they don't all have to be accessible, Hansen said. "However, all non-accessible entrances must have clear signage directing the way to the nearest accessible entrance," she added.
- 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 the 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 an accessible level, no more than four feet above the ground.

- The removal of steps generally results in the installation of ramps or lifts. In stores 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 six 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, Hansen said. This prevents

steep drop-offs, and increases the overall safety of the ramp.

- All accessible ramps must be a minimum of 36-inches 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 special security gates or even turnstiles should be built or modified so people who use wheelchairs, canes, crutches or walkers can easily enter and exit. Suitable options include removing the turnstile, implementing an accessible turnstile or providing an accessible gate adjacent to existing standard turnstiles.

RAMPS AND CORD COVERS

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 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.
- At a minimum, cord protectors should be made from standard heavy-duty polyurethane that can be connected to ADA-compliant ramps.
- 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, visit the U.S. Department of Justice's ADA Standards for Accessible Design at www.ada.gov. **CSD**