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Article 2

THE INS AND OUTS OF ADA SIGNAGE

The United States Justice Department has made it quite clear that "public accommodations" which include schools and hospitals should be finished with the removal of "readily achievable" barriers. Since signage systems are highly visible, easy to change, and relatively inexpensive to upgrade, it is one of the first things Justice Department officials will look for when a facility is investigated.

As a result, if your facility has not initiated or completed signage upgrades now is the time to start. Although the laws governing ADA signage compliance are straight forward and specific, controversial "gray areas" do exist. These gray areas can be attributed to the fact that even though Title III discusses building code issues, it is not a building code! However, as long as written records of compliance efforts are maintained and a "good faith" effort is made to provide equal access to all persons, the Justice Department should be satisfied.

Tactile Signage

Facility managers are experiencing discomfort when it comes to specifying and/or purchasing ADA sign systems because there is a lot of false information floating around. The bulk of the confusion surrounds tactile signage in terms of which signs must have it and which do not.

Other than some special requirements for elevators, permanent rooms and spaces are the only places where raised text and Braille (tactile) signage is required. Restrooms, room numbers, exit signs, and mechanical rooms are deemed permanent by the Access Board and therefore, must be designated accordingly. The Access Board recommends a two-pronged process for determining if a sign should have raised text and Braille. First, identify which rooms and spaces are permanent. Second, determine whether the designation of that room or space is permanent. If both criteria apply, then tactile signage is required.

Directional/Temporary Signage

While attempting to comply with ADA it is very important to remember that signs providing direction or information about functional spaces of the facility are not required to have raised text or Braille. However, these signs must meet criteria for character height, character proportion, finish, and contrast. Additionally, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), signage that is defined as temporary is exempt from all requirements. A building directory is one example of temporary signage.

Pictograms

the ADAAG requirements surrounding pictograms are resulting in a great deal of confusion within the institutional community. Even though most existing facilities currently use pictograms to identify certain permanent rooms and spaces such as restrooms, the use of pictograms is not required by the ADAAG. However, when pictograms are used to designate a permanent room or space such as a restroom they are subject to specific provisions of the ADAAG.

One of the biggest misconceptions surrounding pictogram usage is that the graphic must be raised above the surface. The confusion stems from the location of the pictogram provisions in ADAAG, which are within the paragraph for raised and Brailled characters. A careful reading of the requirements reveals that there is no provision for the pictogram to be raised.

Raised text and Braille are always required to identify a permanent room or space. Pictograms on the other hand, are an optional item that may accompany but not replace the required tactile signage. Pictograms can be utilized in various areas of a facility and if they are only providing direction or information they are not subject to the ADAAG provisions. However, if the pictogram in question does designate a permanent room or space then it must adhere to the guidelines.

While attempting to bring an institution's signage system into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is best to begin with a signage survey. Conducting a signage survey will determine which signs need to be ADA compliant and which do not. Be sure to maintain a comprehensive written record of the signage changes that will be made. More importantly, however, documentation pertaining to those signs that will not be upgraded should be kept in case a complaint is ever filed. Lastly, formulate a schedule for the work to be done. Scheduling ADA upgrades will not only allow the staff to work more cost effectively but it will also prove to the U.S. Department of Justice that the institution is making a "good faith" effort to comply with the law.

ADA SIGNAGE - Technical Requirements

Rooms/Spaces - Permanent

Signage must comply with the requirements for:

- Raised and Brailled characters
- Pictograms (if applicable)
- Finish and contrast
- Mounting location and height

Directional/Informational Signage

Signage must comply with the requirements for:

- Character proportion
- Character height
- Finish and contrast

International Symbol of Accessibility

Elements and spaces of accessible facilities which must display the symbol:

- Parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities
- Accessible passenger loading zones
- Accessible entrances (inaccessible entrances must display directional signage indicating the nearest accessible entrance)
- Accessible toilet and bathing facilities (when not all are accessible)

ADA Signage - Definitions

- Character Proportion - Letters and numbers must have a width-to-height ratio between 3:5 and 1:1, and a stroke-width-to-height ratio between 1:5 and 1:10.
- Raised and Brailled Characters - must be raised 1/32", in upper case sans serif or simple serif type and must be accompanied by grade 2 Braille.
- Raised Character Height - must be raised 5/8" minimum, 2" high maximum.
- Finish and Contrast - sign characters and backgrounds must be eggshell, matte, or other non-glare finish. The characters and symbols must also contrast with their background (ADAAG recommends a contrast of at least 70%).
- Mounting Location - signage must be installed on the wall adjacent to the latch side of the door. However, if there is no wall space on the latch side of the door, signage shall be placed on the nearest adjacent wall. People must be able to come within 3" of the signage without encountering protruding objects or be within the swing of a door.
- Mounting Height - Signage must be 60" above the finish floor to the centerline of the sign.

- Pictograms - must be placed on a background field that is at least 6" in height. There is no specified width for the boarder, nor any dimensional requirement for the graphic itself. However, pictograms must be accompanied by the equivalent verbal description. The text and Braille must be raised and located below the pictogram and outside of the 6" boarder height.

source: *BOMA INTERNATIONAL'S ADA COMPLIANCE GUIDEBOOK*

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