

What's Next for Accessibility?



Wally Tirado
wally@eabservices.com

In the very near future we'll be seeing an all-new Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). However, it's really not *all that* new. The "new" ADAAG was published in July 2004. The original first published in 1991 and began revisions to its current form in 1995. These guidelines have always offered a basis for standards to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

All federal construction projects are now required to use the new ADAAG. The guidelines are also currently adopted by the Department of Transportation, but have not yet have

been adopted by the Department of Justice. Until that happens, "public accommodation" projects are not required to comply. These guidelines were supposed to have been put into effect this year; however, they are pending administrative review. It's more a question of *when* it will be adopted, not *if*.

Facility managers and architects are most likely to have more than a few questions about the status of the updated guidelines.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

The new ADAAG is the culmination of ten years of design review of the original document to ensure that the needs people with disabilities are met. Technological innovations since its inception have been included to make the guidelines relevant and accurate.

Reach ranges have been lowered to better serve people who use wheelchairs and persons of short stature as well as people with audio or visual impairments. Several provisions for recreational areas have also been added, and there are many changes affecting educational, medical, government and commercial facilities.

In reviewing the new ADAAG, the most obvious change is its format. It has a new look, better graphics and improved layout. The appendix has been removed and advisories have been inserted for clarity. The ADAAG also set out to "harmonize" with model building codes.

CONSISTENCY AND HARMONIZATION

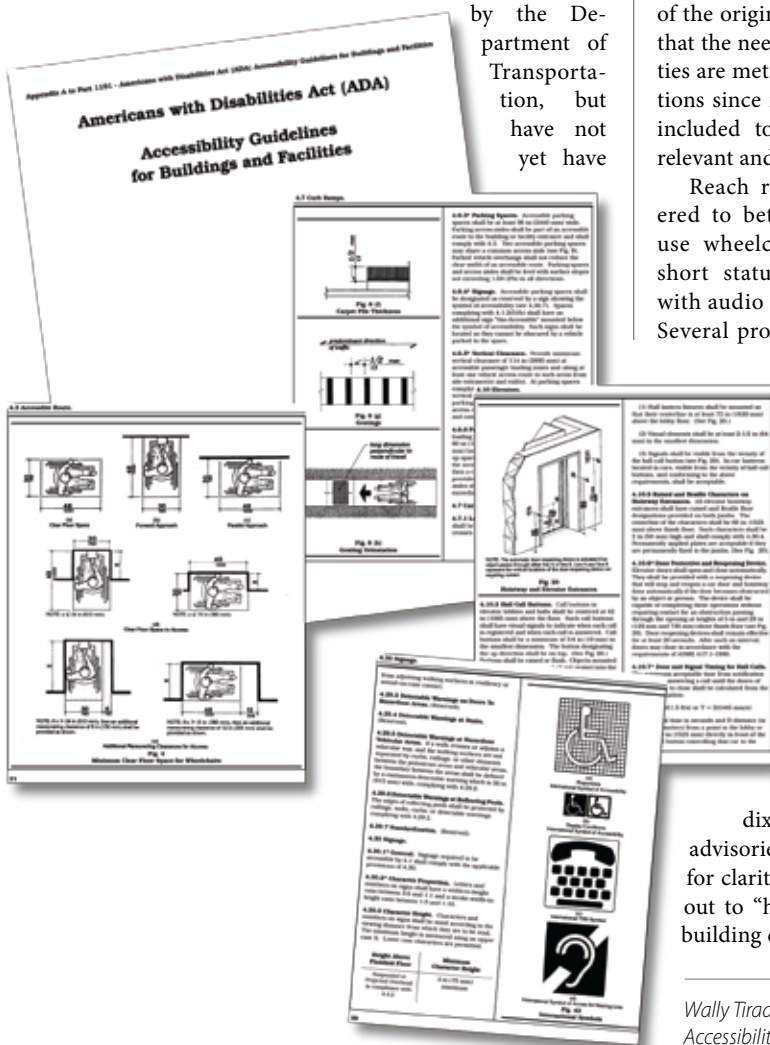
The new ADAAG is more consistent with model building codes (such as the International Building Code) and industry standards. According to the Access Board, the regulatory body that created the ADAAG, "... a high level of harmonization has been achieved which has brought about improvements to the guidelines." With this consistency, compliance will be more widespread. The guidelines are much more 'synchronized' with key industry standards, including those for accessible facilities issued through the American National Standard Institute (ANSI).

Model code professionals were very much committed to developing a comprehensive access criterion. While both the ADA and building codes have worked to achieve a barrier free environment, there were often conflicting terms and technical dimensions, and the civil rights mandates of the ADA have often been at odds with the general welfare accessibility requirements of the building codes.

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

If you are in the process of designing a new building, insist that your architect is designing to the new ADAAG. When its adopted, you're facility will be ready. If you own an existing building, it's not so simple. Start with a survey. Hire an accessibility consultant well versed in multiple guidelines and standards. This is your first line of defense as to what constitutes compliance.

The new ADAAG provides guidance for enhancing facility access. Consult your state and local codes, your architect, contractor, and an accessibility consultant, and have willingness and desire to comply. Recognize the value from the outset; it will ultimately have positive effects for any organization. •



Wally Tirado is a Principal Consultant with EAB Services, LLC. He is a Registered Accessibility Specialist and an ICC Certified Accessibility Inspector/Plans Examiner. EAB Services, LLC provides accessibility-consulting solutions throughout Texas.