



Remodel Right the First Time

Small area remodeling can provide opportunities for incremental improvements in accessibility. Even if the space being remodeled cannot be reached by an accessible path, making it more accessible now may save costs in the future, and will make it more usable for the non-disabled users.

The ADA guidelines can be implemented in a number of ways. The precise solution selected determines how well the resulting building meets local accessibility needs. To ensure that the planned accessibility features meet the needs of users, accessibility reviews should include the clients, architect/builder and individuals with disabilities. The discussions should take place at least three times during the remodeling process:

- 1) During initial discussions desired features for accessibility should be discussed and agreed to, with specific solutions identified.
- 2) On completion of the working plans, the team should evaluate the drawings to assure that all features are shown as they were conceived and agreed to.
- 3) On completion of the rough-in phase, when the plumbing, electrical service, HVAC, and other services have been installed, but before the wall surfaces (sheetrock, plaster, etc.) have been applied, a walk-through including the members of the team should focus on the accessibility of the construction. If accessibility problems are identified at this stage, modifications can be made at much lower cost than after the finish work has been done.

For each of these reviews, the primary meeting topic should be the accessibility of the reconstruction. When accessibility issues are combined with discussions of finish materials, electrical service, and landscaping, they are often overlooked.



When considering accessibility features to be implemented in the remodeling, consider each of the following:

- During a remodel, consider reducing any unevenness in the floor to smooth bumps, valleys, and other barriers to people with mobility impairments.
- New floor materials should be selected with consideration of both mobility and chemical sensitivity. Firm surfaces are easier for those using mobility devices, but hard surfaces can be slick when wet. In wet climates, carpet can be a haven for molds and spores.
- If windows are replaced or installed, designing the lower sill to be no more than 43 inches above the floor allows seated occupants to see out.
- Openable windows should be usable by those with limited hand strength. Crank or powered windows are easier to operate sliding windows.
- Although a switch or thermostat that is 48 inches from the floor meets the minimum ADA standard, one at 40 inches is much easier to use. Similarly, outlets at 19 inches above the floor are easier to reach than those at 15 inches. The ADA limits define the reach extremes. Placing controls inside the limits improves usability for everyone.
- The process of remodeling is often disruptive to normal operations, not just for the services provided in the space being remodeled, but for services in adjacent spaces. Construction vehicles and equipment may block accessible paths. Excavations disrupt normal traffic flows. During remodeling, assure that all services affected remain accessible. When an accessible route will be blocked for more than 1 hour, an alternative path and notification of the new path provided if a form that people with sensory disabilities (both sight and sound) can use.

(2009) Anson, D., Smith, R.O.