



Are You ADA Compliant?

Existing Building Exteriors From the Outside Looking In

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ADA compliance is not new and has been a part of commercial real estate development for years. With ground-up projects and construction, accessibility is top-of-mind. However, recently ensuring proper compliance accessibility for existing buildings has resurfaced as a hot topic. This is true for not only for interior spaces but also building exteriors – the area we focus on here with a brief overview of the “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How” that can never hurt.



Why is ADA compliance important?

Beyond being the law, ADA compliance is a matter of equality and providing equal access and opportunities to people with disabilities. This spans all aspects of life but in the realm of real estate, it encompasses requiring that accessible facilities are “free from barriers” – whether for employment, shopping, travel, entertainment and more.

Who are the responsible parties?

“Private entities that own, lease, lease to or operate a place of public accommodation” have the responsibility to maintain compliance. This applies to both landlords and tenants of such businesses open to public.

What structures are Public Accommodations?

According to the ADA, “a place of public accommodation is a facility whose operations affect commerce and fall within at least one of the following 12 categories:”

1. Places of lodging (e.g., inns, hotels, motels, except for owner-occupied establishments renting fewer than six rooms)
2. Establishments serving food or drink (e.g., restaurants and bars)
3. Places of exhibition or entertainment (e.g., motion picture houses, theaters, concert halls, stadiums)
4. Places of public gathering (e.g., auditoriums, convention centers, lecture halls)
5. Sales or rental establishments (e.g., bakeries, grocery stores, hardware stores, shopping centers)
6. Service establishments (e.g., laundromats, dry-cleaners, banks, barber shops, beauty shops, travel services, shoe repair services, funeral parlors, gas stations, offices of accountants or lawyers, pharmacies, insurance offices, professional offices of health care providers, hospitals)
7. Public transportation terminals, depots, or stations (not including facilities relating to air transportation)
8. Places of public display or collection (e.g., museums, libraries, galleries)
9. Places of recreation (e.g., parks, zoos, amusement parks) Places of education
10. Places of education (e.g., nursery schools, elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or postgraduate private schools)
11. Social service center establishments (e.g., day care centers, senior citizen centers, homeless shelters, food banks, adoption agencies)
12. Places of exercise or recreation (e.g., gymnasiums, health spas, bowling alleys, golf courses)

How to determine ADA compliance?

It all begins with the “survey” – a specific, well-defined checklist established for ADA compliance. While the comprehensive guide includes building space inside and out, once again we focus here on the exterior components.

- Site arrival points such as drop-off areas and sidewalks: Confirm there is an accessible route to an accessible entrance.
- Parking lot or garage: Confirm the correct number of accessible parking spaces, including van-accessible spaces, and there is an accessible route from the accessible parking spaces to an accessible entrance?
- Accessible entrances: Confirm there are signs at inaccessible entrances directing people to the accessible entrance.
- Parking spaces: Confirm measurements from the center of marking lines meet the standard.
- Accessible slopes: Confirm running and cross slope measurements using a level and tape measure or digital level for both the surface and ramps of accessible routes.

Where to review onsite?

The ADA Checklist provides very detailed guidance when it comes to compliance and the related regulations, leaving little room for confusion as to what is and is not acceptable. For example, the parking space ratio which is one (1) accessible space for every 1 to 25 total spaces. Here are just some of the onsite exterior areas and questions to be asked:

Route of Travel

- Is there a route of travel that does not require the use of stairs?
- Is the route at least 36 inches wide?
- Can all objects protruding into the circulation paths be detected by a person with a visual disability using a cane?
- Do curbs on the route have curb cuts at drives, parking, and drop-offs?

Ramps

- Are the slopes of ramps no greater than 1:12?
- Do all ramps longer than 6 feet have railings on both sides?
- Are ramps non-slip?
- Does the ramp rise no more than 30 inches between landings?

Parking and Drop-Off Areas

- Are an adequate number of accessible parking spaces available (8 feet wide for car plus 5-foot access aisle)?
- Are 8-foot-wide spaces, with minimum 8-footwide access aisles, and 98 inches of vertical clearance, available for lift-equipped vans?
- Are the accessible spaces closest to the accessible entrance?
- Are accessible spaces marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility? Are there signs reading “Van Accessible” at van spaces?

Entrance

- If there are stairs at the main entrance, is there also a ramp or lift, or is there an alternative accessible entrance?
- Do all inaccessible entrances have signs indicating the location of the nearest accessible entrance?
- Can the alternate accessible entrance be used independently?
- Does the entrance door have at least 32 inches clear opening (for a double door, at least one 32-inch leaf)?

When to get started?

That’s the easiest answer. If you have made or plan to make changes to the building exterior, an ADA compliance survey is a must. It is also wise for new owners and/or tenants to consider a review. Lastly if you have any questions, concerns or complaints regarding the various areas that fall with the ADA guidelines, seeking an experienced civil engineering firm or consultant is a good first step.

Source: <https://www.adachecklist.org/>