



ANTICIPATING ACCESSIBILITY CHANGES

What new Ontario Building Code standards will mean for new and existing facilities starting next year

The many changes introduced in Ontario's new Accessibility Act are already in effect. But the province is now making all of the necessary 'built environment' changes relating to the Accessibility Act through an addendum to the Ontario Building Code. Many 'users of space' are quite anxious to understand what these changes will mean for their offices.

These new Ontario Building Code standards will need to be met in new projects, from Jan. 1, 2015, onwards. The province is not asking existing facility owners to implement these changes – unless they are renovating their space, at which time they will need to integrate them. Herewith is a summary of only a few of the changes:

1. Every doorway that is located in a barrier-free path of travel will need to have a clear open width of 34 inches. This means doors will be approximately 38 inches wide, depending on the hardware depth. And as doors will require the standard 24-inch access space on the hardware side of the door, this may well have an impact on corridor widths.
2. Power door operators will be required at the entrance doors and entry vestibules of most buildings, as well as on all barrier-free washrooms. These controls must be operable with a closed fist, not simply one hand.
3. Tactile texture strips will be required as a way of warning anyone who is visually impaired of a change in the floor, be it a cut-out or a level change. These warning strips are to be placed in advance of the level

change, not just on the edge of the level change.

4. Wherever possible, space will need to be designed to allow all people to access all areas. Even small areas such as hoteling stations will need to be set up with the assumption that someone using an assistive device has the right to use the station with the same independence and dignity with which others use it.
5. Currently mandated handicapped stalls in public washrooms are often unable to accommodate larger assistive devices and personal assistants who are required to be in the stall with handicapped individuals. These stalls will need to increase in size to allow for a clear turning radius of 1,500 millimetres and specific "transfer space" of at least 900 millimetres by 1,500 millimetres.
6. When an individual's personal assistant is not of the same sex as he or she is, they are not able to use the handicapped facility in the washrooms provided for a dedicated sex. To address this, the new standards will require a minimum of one private bathroom per floor or, in multi-storey buildings, one private bathroom for every three floors. These private washrooms are not meant to replace the need for handicapped stalls in public washrooms; choice should be provided.

7. All corridors in offices (including public ring corridors provided by the landlord on multi-tenant floors) will be required to provide the new wider turning radius for individuals every 30 metres (98.5 feet) at a minimum. This will allow individuals with assistive devices to turn around and change direction without having to wheel more than 30 metres. But ideally, the corridors should be designed to be at least 1,800 millimetres (71 inches) to allow everyone to turn around at any point. This will also allow for easier passage of people traveling in opposite directions.
8. The changes include new provisions for the hearing impaired. All smoke alarms will be required to have an audio and visual component.
9. Barrier-free drinking fountains in corridors and barrier-free urinals in men's washrooms will become a requirement.
10. Lastly, all mounting heights and configuration of grab bars and accessories in washrooms have been amended to be more effective for more people. For example, the diagonal grab bars beside water closets will be replaced with L-shaped configurations, as they have proven to provide better support.

It's important to note that these changes often result in more square footage being needed. But if clever planning and design is used, often these new code standards can be accommodated in very little extra space, by simply using space differently. | **CFM&D**

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