

Memo for Record

Accessibility Requirements for Stairways

Purpose

This memorandum is provided to clarify the accessibility requirements for various types of stairways in public buildings.

Applicable Codes and Standards

This memorandum is based on scoping and technical requirements established in The 2010 ADA Standards¹ (ADA scoping and technical provisions) and the 2009 IBC² (scoping) plus 2003 ANSI A117.1³ (technical provisions).

Hierarchy of Stairway Uses and Requirements

Stairs are generally not accessible for people who use wheelchairs. They are, however, usable by many people with disabilities including those with hearing, vision, and mental disabilities, as well as many people with mobility disabilities that reduce the ability to walk but do not require use of a wheelchair.

Technical requirements for stairs are based on a hierarchy of the intended use of the stairs. These include circulation paths, means of egress, and accessible means of egress. The requirements aggregate as we progress through the hierarchy. That is, the requirements for a circulation path also apply to the means of egress because the means of egress is also a circulation path. The sections that follow detail the requirements for each level of stair usage.

Circulation Paths

A circulation path is defined in the 2010 ADA Standards and IBC/ANSI A117.1 as an exterior or interior way of passage provided for pedestrian travel. The 2010 ADA Standards adds the following: "including but not limited to, walks, hallways, courtyards, elevators, platform lifts, ramps, *stairways, and landings* (emphasis added)." Thus, if a stairway or stairway landing is available for public use, it is part of a circulation path. The remainder of this section applies to stairways that are part of a circulation path.

Circulation paths must comply with the technical provisions concerning protruding objects (2010 ADA Standards §307 and 2003 ANSI A117.1 §307). Therefore standpipes and their associated valve controls that exist within a stair core must not protrude more than four inches between 27 and 80 inches above the floor. The same is true for any open stairway in a common or public use area.

The ADA Standards do not require handrails on stairs that are not part of a means of egress, but local building codes may do so.

¹ 2010 Standards for Titles II and III Facilities: 2004 ADAAG, U.S. Department of Justice, September 15, 2010.

² 2009 International Building Code, International Code Council, 2009.

³ 2003 A117.1 Accessibility Standards, International Code Council, 2003.

Means of Egress

The IBC defines a means of egress as a continuous and unobstructed path of vertical and horizontal egress travel from any occupied portion of a building or structure to a public way. The type and size of the occupancy generally defines the number of required means of egress from any occupied space.

Stairways that are part of a means of egress must comply with the technical provisions for stairways in §504 of the ADA Standards and ANSI A117.1 and §1009 of the IBC.

Where doors and gates that are a part of a means of egress, the clear opening must be 32 inches (815 mm) minimum (2009 IBC §1008.1.1).

Directional signage to accessible means of egress must be provided at means of egress that are not themselves accessible (2009 IBC §1007.10 & 2010 ADA Standards §216.4.3). Signs that provide direction to or information about means of egress must comply with §703.5 of the ADA Standards. Exit doors at means of egress (exit passageways, exit discharges, and exit stairways) must be identified with tactile signage that complies with §§703.1, 703.1, and 703.5 of the ADA Standards.

Accessible Means of Egress

The 2010 ADA Standards define an accessible means of egress as a continuous and unobstructed way of egress travel from any point in a building or facility that provides an accessible route to an area of refuge, a horizontal exit, or a public way. At least one accessible means of egress must be provided from each space and two accessible means of egress must be provided where more than one means of egress is provided.

Because an accessible means of egress is by definition accessible, it must be an accessible route. This does not imply anything additional about the stairs themselves, but if the stair landing is integral to the area of refuge, then the landing and any door leading to the landing must be accessible.

Signs required by §1007.11 of the 2009 IBC to provide instructions in areas of refuge shall comply with §703.5 of the ADA Standards.

Summary of Stairway Requirements

Table 1 presents a summary of all ADA and IBC/ANSI requirements that pertain to stairways. In each case, the table identifies which of the three categories of stairways must comply with the requirements. Citations provided in the table are to the 2010 ADA Standards and 2003 ANSI A117.1.

Table 1 - Summary of Stairway Accessibility Requirements

Requirement	Circulation Path	Means of Egress	Accessible Means of Egress
Protruding objects (§307)	X	X	X
Stairs			
Uniform treads and risers (§504.2)		X	X
No open risers (§504.3)		X	X
Level tread surface (§504.4)		X	X
Nosing requirements (§504.5)		X	X
Handrails (§§504.6 & 505)		X	X
Prevent water accumulation (§504.7)		X	X
Doors to stairs			
32" clear opening (§404.2.3, IBC §1008.1.1)		X	X
Maneuvering clearance (§404.2.4)			X
Clear floor space (§404.2.4)			X
Thresholds (§404.2.5)			X
Hardware (§404.2.7)			X
Closing speed (§404.2.8)			X
Door pressure (§404.2.9)			X
Signage			
Tactile exit signs (§§216.4.1, 703.1, 703.2, 703.5)		X	X
Area of refuge instructions (§§216.4.2, 703.5)			X
Directions to accessible means of egress (§§216.4.3, 703.5)		X	