

When the ADA arrived in 1991, little was known about the effective public use of tactile and Braille signs. Outside of elevators, very few signs with Braille were in place and available for the blind.

The Americans with Disabilities Act truly changed the landscape for the disabled. Its passage in 1990 established the U.S. Access Board as the agency responsible for writing the specifications that make the built environment accessible. The original ADA guidelines, first released in 1991 in the *Federal Register*, are still in effect today. The Access Board has been working continuously on the next generation of guidelines, incorporating new research and technology to improve the guidelines and provide for greater accessibility.

When it comes to accessibility, both federal and local regulations should be considered. If there are differences between the two technical standards, the more stringent, the one providing greater accessibility, should be followed.

The organization that writes accessibility code that state and local governments use as a model is the ANSI A117.1 Committee. The Committee is currently working on the 2003 Edition of their model accessibility standard. The sign requirements in the ANSI 98 model code have already been adopted by several states, including New Mexico, Connecticut and New York.

During the last ANSI cycle, which produced the 1998 standard, the Access Board worked with the Committee to update and harmonize their documents so that there would be little or no difference between the model code standard and the federal guideline. The Access Board expects to publish its final guidelines for a new ADAAG in the *Federal Register* later this summer, and is likely to incorporate many of the same requirements as ANSI 98.

What are some of the things that are changing about the requirements for signs in this new generation of accessibility codes?

### **Tactile Characters**

As sans serif characters with thin strokes are easier to read by touch, fewer typefaces will be permitted for room identification signs. Spacing between raised characters will be wider and Braille placement will be designated under the corresponding raised characters.

There is a new provision for separate tactile and visual characters. With this approach, the divergent needs of visual and tactile readers can be met more effectively. When separate visual and tactile characters are used, the tactile characters can be as small as ½" and are not required to contrast with their background. Visual characters can be upper and lower case, and typeface selection is much broader, allowing far greater design flexibility. Several leading graphic design firms have already taken this approach with their projects.

## Permanent Room ID - Wall Mounted

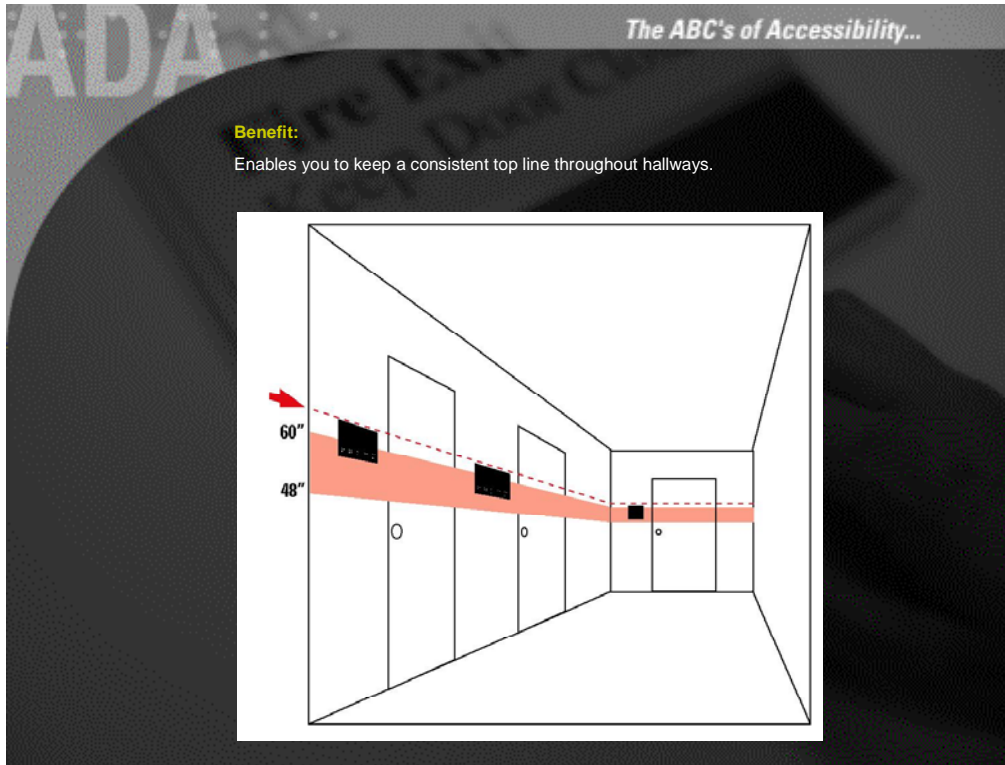
**Proposed New ADAAG Guidelines:**

New provision for Separate Tactile and Visual Messages.



## Mounting Height

Unlike the current ADAAG, the new generation of accessibility codes provides a range of heights for mounting tactile signs. This allows signs to be placed at a uniform height, even if the signs themselves are different sizes. As long as the tactile characters and Braille are located between 48" and 60" above the floor surface, the mounting height is acceptable. Tactile signs are allowed on doors, as long as the door remains closed, opens inwardly and cannot be held open (examples: hotel rooms, restrooms, fire exit doors).



The industry has developed many products in the last decade for the visually impaired. As the requirements for tactile signs evolve, sign companies will offer products that are more effective for both the tactile and the sighted reader.

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