



Spotlight on Accessibility: Swimming pools **New ADA Rules Spark Interest in Reviewing Pool Programs**

By Bryan Moffitt, SIA ADA Specialist

Swimming pool accessibility has become a hot topic this year with many articles, websites, radio programs and even public protests addressing the issue. The reason is the inclusion of new regulatory requirements for pools in the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (2010 ADA Standards). Although these standards became effective on March 15, 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) recently announced that it has delayed the compliance date for the pool accessibility requirements to January 31, 2013, because of implementation questions.

The new federal requirements actually overlap and expand on existing California specifications for pool lifts which have been in the California Building Code (CBC) Title 24 since 2001. Providing accessible and compliant pool entry and exit means meeting both of these standards, although there are only a few California standards that will exceed those in the 2010 ADA Standards.

The most significant new requirements include the definition of the number and type of accessible means of pool entry. Larger swimming pools with more than 300 feet of linear wall will require two means of accessible entry, while those with less than 300 feet will require only one. The primary means of entry must be either a pool lift or a sloped entry. Existing pools will typically be equipped or retrofitted with pool lifts. Pools that require a secondary means of entry can use either of those methods or others, such as transfer walls, transfer systems or pool stairs as defined in Sections 242 and 1009 of the 2010 ADA Standards.

The pool lift is the most common equipment used to provide accessibility. There are models that are more permanently mounted into the pool deck or apron, and others that are portable units that can be wheeled onto the pool deck. Both permanent installations and portable lift equipment must meet several specifications including for lift capacity, independent operation, seat dimensions/features and many other elements.

A very important recent development is the announcement by USDOJ that a portable pool lift must be able to affix to the pool deck in order to be considered compliant under the new standards. This will have a significant impact on equipment purchases because some portable models provide this option and others do not. Because of this recent policy decision, some lifts identified by the manufacturer as compliant with the California and ADA standards would now be considered non-compliant if they were purchased today.

Many pool lifts also offer additional features which are not required by the accessibility standards but which are important for providing greater safety and reducing liability exposure. These include an activation key system on the main panel to turn the unit off when not in use, a main panel switch to raise the seat out of the water in the event of a remote control malfunction, the ability to detach and store the more permanently installed units for winterization and long-term storage, and a cover to reduce visibility when not in use.

The new federal regulations provide a good opportunity to assess current pool programs for accessibility. Districts that are reviewing their pools or are in the market for pool lifts can check out the new Accessible Swimming Pool tab under the ADA section on the SIA website. This section includes need-to-know details about the state and federal standards, up-to-date policy decisions and documents from the USDOJ, along with information on what to look for in a pool lift. For questions or more information on pool accessibility issues, contact Bryan Moffitt at bmoffitt@sia-jpa.org.