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Advisory Committee Presents Report on Vessel Alarm Systems

The Passenger Vessel Emergency Alarms Advisory Committee presented its report on accessible vessel alarms systems at a meeting of the Board in September. The Board organized this committee last year to prepare recommendations on how new guidelines the Board is developing for passenger vessels should address emergency alarm systems for passengers with hearing impairments. The committee's membership included representatives from disability organizations, the vessel and cruise ship industry and trade groups, and the National Fire Protection Association, among others.

In the course of its work, the committee reviewed current emergency notification and safety practices, protocols, and standards adopted by the U.S. Coast Guard, international authorities, and other countries. Representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard and industry representatives provided information for the committee's use on standard procedures for notifying passengers of emergencies aboard various types of vessels, including cruise ships, ferries, excursion vessels, and gaming boats. Disability organizations presented information on the population of people with hearing impairments and common methods and technologies for providing communication access.

The committee's report outlines consensus recommendations on providing access to vessel alarm systems in public use areas and to those located in passenger cabins. Based on its review of available signaling technologies, the committee recommends the incorporation of visual appliances so that audible alarm systems are equally accessible to passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. Recommendations also address hazards flashing signals can pose to individuals with photosensitive epilepsy. In addition to alarms systems, the committee's report covers how access to safety briefings and evacuation instructions can be provided for passengers who are hard of hearing through available communication technologies, such as assistive listening systems. The committee identified areas where further research is needed and recommended that the Board coordinate its work on this issue with other authorities in the U.S. and abroad, such as the International Maritime Organization, the International Organization for Standardization, and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The Board will address access to emergency alarm systems according to the committee's recommendations in guidelines it is preparing for passenger vessels. These guidelines will be made available for public comment. Information on the work of the committee, including its report, is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/pvaac/alarms/. For further information, contact Paul Beatty at pvag@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0012 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Passenger Vessel Emergency Alarms Advisory Committee

- Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network
- Cruise Lines International Association
- Epilepsy Foundation
- Gallaudet University
- Hearing Access Program

- Hearing Loss Association of America
 - National Association of the Deaf
 - National Fire Protection Association
 - Passenger Vessel Association
 - Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineer
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ADA and ABA Standards Available on the Board's Website

Guidelines previously issued by the Board are driving updates to design standards used to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). Not only will the standards be brought up-to-date, but they will be made more uniform under both the ADA, which covers facilities in the private sector and the state and local government sector, and the ABA which applies primarily to Federal facilities. Several different Federal agencies are involved in this work, and final action on some standards is still pending. As a result, original versions of the standards remain in effect for some ADA or ABA facilities while updated versions are in place for others.

To help users navigate this temporary mix of old and new standards, the Board has posted additional guidance on its website on which standards to follow according to facility type. This information explains the scope and status of each of the standards and provides direct links to the version in effect, including newly posted editions of updated ADA and ABA standards adopted by enforcing agencies. This webpage, located at www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/guide.htm, also provides information on the status of standards that are pending, including those the Department of Justice (DOJ) intends to adopt under the ADA.

DOJ's standards apply to all facilities covered by the ADA except transportation facilities, which are subject to standards from the Department of Transportation (DOT). Last June, DOJ published for public comment a notice to adopt new standards which it is currently finalizing. The final notice will specify an effective date for the new standards. Until that date, DOJ's original ADA standards remain in effect. Updated standards adopted by DOT are in effect for transportation facilities covered by the ADA, including bus stops and stations, rail stations, and airports.

ABA standards apply to facilities that are federally funded. Most ABA facilities are subject to standards maintained by the General Services Administration (GSA). GSA has issued updated standards, as has the U.S. Postal Service, which maintains standards for facilities under its jurisdiction. Updated standards are pending from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Defense (DOD). Until new HUD and DOD standards are in place, the original standards, the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS), remain in effect for federally funded housing and military facilities.

Technical assistance on all ADA and ABA standards, including further guidance on which standards to follow, is available from the Board through its toll-free line at (800) 872-2253 (v) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY), or by email at ta@access-board.gov.

Standards for ADA Facilities

- Places of Public Accommodation and Commercial Facilities: DOJ's original ADA Standards (1991, reprinted 1994)
- State and Local Government Facilities (except transportation): DOJ's original ADA standards (with some exceptions) or UFAS
- Transportation Facilities: Updated ADA Standards (DOT)

Standards for ABA Facilities

- Federal Facilities (other than postal, housing, and military facilities): Updated ABA Standards (GSA)
 - Postal Facilities: Updated ABA standards (USPS)
 - Housing: UFAS (until HUD updates its standards)
 - Military Facilities: UFAS (until DOD updates its standards)
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Committee on Emergency Transportable Housing to Present Report

The Board's Advisory Committee on Emergency Transportable Housing will present its recommendations at the Board's next meeting in November. This committee was organized to examine access to housing trailers made available by the government in response to natural disasters and emergencies. Access to such housing proved problematic in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The committee, which included representation from disability groups, industry and code groups, and government agencies, reviewed standard designs for these types of trailers and assessed engineering and other constraints. The committee's findings will indicate how, and to what extent, emergency transportable housing can be made accessible according to existing specifications for residential facilities. The committee's presentation to the Board will take place November 18th from 2:30 to 5:00 at the Westin Arlington Gateway, 801 North Glebe Road, in Arlington, Virginia. For further information, contact Marsha Mazz at mazz@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0020 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY). Information on the work of this committee is posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/eth/.

Amendments to the ADA Signed Into Law

In September, Congress passed, and President Bush signed into law, amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that are intended to clarify and reiterate who is covered by the law's civil rights protections. The "ADA Amendments Act of 2008" revises the definition of "disability" to more broadly encompass impairments that substantially limit a major life activity. The amended language also states that mitigating measures, including assistive devices, auxiliary aids, accommodations, medical therapies and supplies (other than eyeglasses and contact lenses) have no bearing in determining whether a disability qualifies under the law. Changes also clarify coverage of impairments that are episodic or in remission that substantially limit a major life activity when active, such as epilepsy or post traumatic stress disorder. "This bill fulfills the promise of the ADA and greatly increases the number of people eligible for its protections," stated Senator Tom Harkin, a leading sponsor of the act. The amendments take effect January 1, 2009. The text of the law is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/about/laws/ada-amendments.htm.

Board and Census Bureau Host 508 Training Day

The Board and the U.S. Census Bureau held a full-day training on Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act on September 26th. The event focused on the Board's Section 508 standards which cover access to electronic and information technology procured by the Federal government. David Baquis, a Board 508 accessibility specialist, opened the program with an overview of the standards and was followed by presenters from the Census Bureau and the Department of Commerce, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Education, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Presentations addressed a variety of topics, including compliant electronic content, product testing, e-learning, and program development, among others. The free, open-invitation event drew over 250 attendees to the Census Bureau's headquarters outside D.C. and to other sites offering remote conferencing. Participants included Federal employees and contractors involved in 508 implementation and IT procurement, IT providers, and consumer organizations. Additional information is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/sec508/training.htm.

The Board regularly provides training on all of its guidelines and standards and on accessible design. For further information, contact Peggy Greenwell, the Board's Training Coordinator at training@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0017 (v), (202) 272-0082 (TTY), or visit the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/training.htm.

New Study Released on Home Visitability

"Visitability" is an approach that integrates some basic accessibility features into home design so that access is available to a greater range of people. Though coined for visitor access, the concept offers benefits to residents and homeowners as well by facilitating access that may be needed in the future. Since disability becomes more prevalent with age, this design practice can provide age-in-place alternatives to nursing homes and assisted living and help strengthen communities. Features of visitability include an entrance without steps, doorways with sufficient (32 inch minimum) clearance, and a bathroom on the ground floor.

A recent report commissioned by AARP's Public Policy Institute examines strategies to promote visitability in home construction and renovation. Conducted by the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA Center), this study reviewed efforts various jurisdictions have employed, including voluntary initiatives, incentive programs, and local ordinances. From this assessment, researchers offer recommendations on effective strategies and future opportunities for promoting visitability. The report from the study, "Increasing Home Access: Designing for Visitability," is available on AARP's website at www.aarp.org/ppi.

Resources on Home Access and Visitability

- IDEA Center www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea/Visitability/
- Center for Universal Design www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/
- Institute for Human Centered Design (formerly Adaptive Environments) www.humancentereddesign.org
- National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification www.homemods.org
- Department of Housing and Urban Development www.hud.gov/groups/disabilities.cfm
- Visitability www.visitability.org
- Concrete Change www.concretechange.org
- Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>

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