

ADA General Guidelines

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law on July 26, 1990. It is summarized by: "No person shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation." The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, programs and services provided by state and local government, goods and services provided by private companies, and in commercial facilities.

This Act includes provisions to accommodate hard of hearing people, including incorporating Assistive Listening Systems in new building construction, in alterations or renovations to buildings and facilities of private companies providing goods or services to the public. It also requires that State and local governments provide access for the hard of hearing in programs offered to the public.

Types of Public Facilities that must Comply with ADA Requirements

Places of public accommodation that must comply with ADA requirements include restaurants, hotels, theaters, convention centers, retail stores, shopping centers, dry cleaners, Laundromats, pharmacies, doctors' offices, hospitals, museums, libraries, parks, zoos, amusement parks, private schools, day care centers, health spas, and bowling alleys.

Commercial facilities are required to comply with ADA. They include office buildings, factories and warehouses whose operations affect commerce.

Religious organizations (including places of worship), residential housing, and private clubs do not need to comply. However many places of worship voluntarily offer assistance for hard of hearing people.

Accessibility Requirements for Hard of Hearing People

- New construction of public facilities must have 4% of seating or people capacity accessible to hard of hearing people (please note, New York requires 9% of capacity).
- Existing public facilities seating more than 50 people, 4% of the seats must be accessible.
- Existing public facilities seating less than 50 people, 4% of seats, but not less than two seats must be accessible to hear of hearing people.
- Existing public facilities under renovation require full 4% accessibility if the cost of making it accessible does not exceed 20% of the renovation cost, otherwise, full accessibility is not required.

What is an Assistive Listening Device?

Under the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act, to make public facilities accessible to persons with disabilities, thousands of public meeting areas have been and are being equipped with Assistive Listening Devices (ALD).

These installations are being designed to help hard of hearing people to better understand speech, music, and other sounds during a movie, performance, lecture, meeting or worship service.

Like a hearing aid, an assistive listening device makes sounds louder. Typically a hearing aid makes all sounds in the environment louder. An assistive listening device can increase the loudness of a desired sound (a radio or television, a public speaker, an actor or actress, someone talking in a noisy place) without increasing the loudness of the background noise.

People with all degrees and types of hearing loss-even people with normal hearing-can benefit from assistive listening devices. Some ALD are used with a hearing aid. Some can be used without a hearing aid.