

Accessibility Bits

Proper height necessary for counters and tables

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After a person with a disability has maneuvered from an accessible parking space, followed an accessible route and successfully utilized an accessible building entrance, the lobby or reception area of that building is next on the agenda. Most likely, the visitor will end up facing a counter – either a single unit with a receptionist or a multiple-unit configuration providing space for several staff to assist the public.

The typical reception counter height is 42 inches from floor to countertop, designed for use as a writing surface by an individual of average height who is standing. A person of short stature or someone using a wheelchair or scooter can't easily use the counter for writing or passing documents. In fact, the visitor can't even establish good visual contact with the building/hotel/office staff. Solutions to these issues are defined in the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

ADAAG's Section 4.32.4 Height of Tables or Counters states: "The tops of accessible tables and counters shall be from 28 inches to 34 inches above the finish floor or ground." An accessible reception counter should have a maximum height of 34 inches, either for the entire counter or a designated section of the counter unit.

A clear floor space (ADAAG 4.24.5 Clear Floor Space) of at least 30 inches wide by 48 inches deep should be provided in front of the accessible counter. The minimum counter width should also be at least 30 inches (with 36 inches preferred).

Specifically for hotel counters, a projecting surface of one foot, seven inches, with a minimum 27-inch knee space below (4.32.3 Knee Clearances) is recommended as a writing surface for guests who use wheelchairs.

An accessible counter can easily be provided in new construction. To retrofit an existing higher counter in an older building, an end portion of the counter could be lowered, or a center counter section could be removed ("cutout") and rebuilt. Alternatively, depending on the counter configuration, a small table or lower work



An accessible lower counter at the end of a line of standing height counters in the lobby gives a person in a wheelchair the opportunity to write conveniently and maintain eye contact. This counter at The Job Center in Montgomery County is 48 inches wide and 30 inches from floor to top of counter.

surface could be added to one side of an existing higher counter.

In addition to reception areas, individuals may need to access free-standing tables, computer workstations, laboratory stations or study carrels once in an office. Work surfaces such as these should comply for maximum height/minimum knee clearance. Tables can be safer for wheelchair users and others if rounded corners and edges are provided, and sharp corners are eliminated. An accidental bump on the sharp corner of a table could

be a bruising experience for people with or without a mobility impairment.

Computer workstations should provide the required 27-inch knee clearance *without* pull-out keyboard holders infringing into this space. Carefully designed workstations will provide adequate space for the monitor, keyboard, CPU and all other peripherals while still complying with standards.

For more information on ADAAG, contact marilyn.sydow@rsc.state.oh.us.



Because of space infringement by the keyboard holder, this computer work station provides only 25 inches of knee clearance, instead of the required 27 inches.