

## ***We're going to try to make the ADA requirements for elevator and emergency phones easier to understand - by putting them IN PLAIN ENGLISH.***

If you own or manage a building, you're aware of your duty to make it safe and accessible to everyone. The passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1992 brought with it several new regulations pertaining to equal building access for the disabled. Elevator access was one of the issues addressed in the Act. So too was the issue of equal access to emergency assistance in the event of an emergency. To obtain that emergency assistance and guarantee that it be available to everyone including the disabled, the Act put in place new requirements for the emergency phones traditionally located in elevators.

### **Do you have to install emergency phones?**

If you don't already have emergency phones in your building's elevators, the ADA does not force you to install them. However, in 2004 the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) revised its accessibility guidelines for the construction and alteration of buildings and facilities covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Architectural Barriers Act. The revised recommendations are pending at the U.S. Department of Justice. In the meantime, The Department of Transportation, General Services Administration, and United States Postal Service have adopted the revised guidelines as regulatory standards. If the new recommendations are adopted, they will require the installation of an ADA-compliant two-way communication system in elevators and Areas of Refuge.

In addition, the 2006 International Building Code, most likely adopted by your local building inspectors, states that all elevators must comply with ASME A17.1. That engineering document requires a two-way means of emergency communications in passenger elevators. This means of communication must connect with emergency or authorized personnel and not an automated answering system. The communication system must be push button activated. The activation button must be permanently identified with the word "HELP." A visual indication acknowledging the establishment of a communications link to authorized personnel must be provided. The visual indication must remain on until the call is terminated by authorized personnel. The building location, the elevator car number, and the need for assistance must be provided to authorized personnel answering the emergency call. The use of a handset by the communications system is prohibited. Only the authorized personnel answering the call can terminate the call. Operating instructions for the communications system must be provided in the elevator car.

Between the pending changes in the ADA and the 2006 International Building Code, it's important to understand that ADA-compliant emergency phones have become standard in the industry. If passengers are injured in your building elevator and are unable to summon emergency help, they may exert a claim that you failed to follow commonly accepted building safety standards by not installing emergency phones in your buildings.

If you already have phones in your elevators, or are being asked to install them by local building inspectors, be aware that ordinary telephones do NOT comply with ADA regulations. Not only do ordinary phones fail the compliance test, they are usually far more costly over the long run due to the continuing expenses associated with vandalism. Replace a few stolen hearing-aid compatible handsets and you've already exceeded the cost of a vandal-resistant ADA-compliant phone.

ADA requirements also pertain to all other types of emergency phones you may voluntarily choose to install. Whether they are being installed to meet local code, for safety reasons, emergency phones in hallways, lobbies, parking ramps or garages, all of these phones must be accessible to all users including the physically impaired. Thus, they must all be ADA compliant.

## FEDERAL ADA PHONE REQUIREMENTS

### 1. The phone must be located no more than 48" from the floor.

This requirement is designed to keep elevator phones within the reach of wheelchair passengers.

### 2. If the telephone has a handset, the handset cord must be at least 29" long.

### 3. Emergency phones must be hearing aid compatible.

### 4. The emergency telephone must not require voice communications alone.

Explanation: When we think of emergency communications, we usually think of a two-way voice conversation. However, to those persons with vision, hearing, and speech impairments, communication takes on a different meaning entirely, and it's not always audible.

The ADA is explicit that emergency phones must make accommodations for people with such impairments. So the phones must not only be capable of two-way voice communications, but also electronic and visual communication as well. For those with speech impairments, the phone must transmit the location of the calling phone to emergency personnel. This can be accomplished by activating a prerecorded voice message, or by transmitting an electronic or digital identifier code to the personnel receiving the call. Viking emergency phones are Central Station Monitoring compatible and are capable of delivering a digital announcement to identify the location of the emergency call.

For those with hearing impairments, the phone must include a visual indicator that the call has been received and that help is on the way. The visual communication provision can be as simple as a light, illuminated by emergency personnel. Viking emergency phones have a "Call Connected" LED which lights when the call is answered.

### 5. Emergency telephones must have push-button controls where service for such equipment is available.

Explanation: It is just common sense that physically impaired passengers would have difficulty using rotary dial telephones. During a power failure, even able-bodied passengers may have difficulty using a rotary dial phone.

Viking offers single push button dialing which eliminates toll call abuse and reduces vandalism. When the button is pressed, the phones can dial up to 5 programmable emergency numbers and 2 Central Station numbers.

## What is an Area of Refuge or Area of Rescue Assistance?

Both terms describe a safe area within a building where persons with physical impairments can wait for rescue assistance. The ADA requires these special emergency gathering areas in all multi-story residential, commercial, and retail buildings.

### Does an ARA need an emergency phone?

In regards to ARAs, the American's with Disabilities Act also states that a method of two-way communication, with both visible and audible signals, shall be provided between each Area of Rescue Assistance and the primary entry. The two-way communication has similar ADA requirements as elevator telephones: Phones in ARAs are federally mandated. In this respect, the American's with Disabilities Act supersedes all local codes.

**Please Note: Elevator codes are different in every city and state. The elevator inspectors in your area must always have the final say regarding compliance, except for ARAs. This guide is not intended to supersede their authority, nor is it intended as legal advice.**

## What about Parking Ramps, Hallways, Public Buildings, and Campus settings?

The ADA does not require emergency communications for these areas. If your local building code requires emergency phones, they must be ADA-compliant.

## What about Building/Tenant entry systems?

The pending changes to the ADA require that two-way building entry communications systems include a jack to support TTY communication. The changes also require the use of closed-circuit video between the tenant and the building entry door. The Viking AES-2000S door entry system is one of the few entry systems in the market that meets the pending TTY requirement. The AES-2005F includes a TTY jack and a closed-circuit video camera.

**Contact Viking Electronics: (715) 386-8861**

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**IMPORTANT: Codes and requirements are different in every city and state. This guide is not intended to supersede their authority, nor is it intended as legal advice. We make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness contained in this document.**