



Press contact:

Pete Zeller
216.579.6100 ext. 2
email: pete@CunninghamBaron.com

IBC Deals Victory to Accessibility *2021 Version Requires Automatic Doors for Entrances to Public Buildings*

January 28, 2021— The newly released International Building Code (IBC) for 2021 includes a provision long sought by accessibility advocates: the mandated inclusion of automatic doors for entrances to public buildings. IBC 1105.1.1 stipulates that, in facilities meeting building occupant load thresholds for a number of common occupancies, public entrances that are required to be accessible shall have one door be either a full power-operated door or a low-energy power-operated door.

The code applies to a wide range of public places, including retail stores, restaurants, clubs and casinos, movie theaters and concert halls, libraries, banks, and college dormitories. Depending on the type of building, occupant loads must be greater than 300 or 500 for the automatic door requirement to kick in. The thresholds have been chosen so they do not apply to buildings with smaller occupancies and less foot traffic, though occupants of all buildings, regardless of size, could benefit from the touch-free, germ-free accessibility provided by automatic doors.

Joe Hetzel, technical advisor to the American Association of Automatic Door Manufacturers (AAADM), has long been a proponent of greater accessibility and first began working to update the code a decade ago. Language he helped craft was submitted and approved during the 2021 IBC code development cycle, which took place in 2018, resulting in the new requirements.

“The code addresses a public need,” said Hetzel. “It is widely accepted that automatic doors enhance overall accessibility and accommodate a wide array of conditions that might make using standard doors difficult, if not infeasible. The new code requirement accommodates a wide variety of accessibility needs that manual doors being installed today cannot encompass.”

Coincidentally, the new code arrives in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic, which has heightened public interest in touch-free entrances to public buildings.

“At the time we began this process, no one could have envisioned today’s unprecedented concern for minimizing public touchpoints. This new directive on automatic doors will surely enhance public health as well,” said Hetzel. He believes these health-related benefits will provide extra encouragement for establishments below the occupancy thresholds to consider automatic doors in response to public demand.

The IBC is adopted at the state and local levels, and will take time to become the new set of requirements across the nation.

AAADM (American Association of Automatic Door Manufacturers) encourages everyone affected to monitor their markets for the adoption of the 2021 IBC. AAADM is also providing members and other industry professionals with information, alerts, bulletins, and other support as new construction projects transition to the updated code. This will also encourage retrofitting where feasible.

About AAADM

The American Association of Automatic Door Manufacturers (AAADM) is a trade association of manufacturers of automatic pedestrian door systems. AAADM was founded in 1994 with the following mission: to increase awareness of automatic doors and accessibility needs; to increase education, training and professionalism among installers and service providers; and to generally promote the safe use of automatic doors. Each year on March 19, AAADM celebrates National Automatic Door Day to raise awareness about the many benefits of automatic doors, including providing access to those with physical challenges and helping to prevent germs by eliminating the need to touch door handles. www.aadm.com.

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