

The 2013 CBC accessibility provisions and DSA Procedure 13-03

A new era for California's accessible building standards

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The 2013 California Building Code (CBC) Chapter 11B accessible building standards represent a significant change in state accessibility policy and will impact current and upcoming construction projects on our school campuses. The new version of the Chapter 11B standards has an entirely different format and organization with many noteworthy content revisions from the 2010 CBC version. The 2013 CBC regulations were published this summer but will become effective on January 1, 2014.

For the first time, the California accessibility provisions will use the federal accessibility standards – the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (2010 ADA Standards) – as the model code on which they will be based. California's accessibility regulations must meet or exceed these standards established in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

This means that the 2013 California standards will fully incorporate all provisions of the federal standards as minimum requirements, but with the addition of the California amendments to maintain the enhanced levels of accessibility provided by the existing California accessibility regulations. The new Chapter 11B has embedded diagrams for clarification and is also much easier to read and understand than previous versions. More importantly, it will provide a single reference document that will contain all the applicable building standards to meet both the state and federal accessible building requirements. There will no longer be a need to determine whether the state or federal building standard has the “most stringent” accessibility requirement.

An important development with the updated 2013 CBC standards is that a number of technical requirements previously expressed as absolute dimensions in both the 1991 ADA standards and prior editions of the CBC have been changed to dimensional ranges. These dimensional ranges establish reasonable tolerances for field conditions while maintaining the required levels of

accessibility. The move toward dimensional ranges and away from absolute dimensions will be very beneficial in meeting technical compliance with accessibility requirements on school facility construction projects.

All new construction and alteration project applications submitted to DSA after January 1, 2014, will be required to comply with the 2013 CBC, including the new Chapter 11B standards. However, there are many current projects that have been approved under the 2010 CBC, or that are in the planning and design phases, that are citing the 2010 CBC as their reference standards during this period of transition to the 2013 CBC.

To address this issue, DSA recently released Procedure 13-03, which provides instructions for school districts and their design professionals to utilize select provisions of the 2013 Chapter 11B standards for projects that have already been reviewed and approved by DSA under the 2010 CBC or a previous version of the code. Appendix A lists 25 specific items that can be incorporated to take advantage of dimensional ranges and in many cases the loosened standards of the new code.

SIA recommends district review and consideration for utilizing the PR 13-03 procedures for upcoming new construction and alteration projects that have already been DSA-approved under the 2010 CBC standards or that are currently in design phase under the 2010 CBC. This best practices action will help ensure consistency with the published 2013 California accessibility standards and reduce future risk exposure from construction that is in immediate conflict with the standards at the time the work is completed.

The PR 13-03 document and more information, including the full text of the 2013 CBC Chapter 11B standards, are available on the SIA website in the ADA section under the Loss Prevention tab.

