

Enhancing Aquatic Accessibility

The basic framework for swimming pool accessibility is provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), but there is more that you can do to enhance access for your special needs customers.

Special Needs Customers

In any business, understanding your customers is critical to success. If you are a facility seeking to provide an inclusive aquatic environment, it is important that you know your customers and understand their needs and challenges. The simplest and most direct route to understanding is to talk with your customers, either one-on-one or as a group. Ask them about their experience at your facility – How easy was it to get in/out of the pool? Quiz them on how they think access to your pool could be improved. In most instances you will receive feedback that is insightful and actionable. Additionally, look for new accessibility products to test in your facility and use these new approaches as a way to develop deeper relationships with your customers. Lastly, continually research and develop your accessibility knowledge so that you can help your facility stay at the forefront of inclusive aquatics.

Learn more about swimming pool accessibility— Register for updates at www.poollifts.com

Educate and Train Your Staff

Having world class access options is only the first step in creating an inclusive aquatic environment. Having a knowledgeable and educated staff is also a very important piece of the puzzle. Your staff should be well trained on the accessibility equipment in your facility and be able to instruct and assist customers in the proper use of each of these options. Ask your accessibility equipment manufacturer or your pool service provider to perform operator training and if they have an

operator certification program take advantage of it. Additionally, staff should receive training on how to assist customers with special needs, especially those with significant disabilities. Contract with a local physical or occupational therapist who can instruct staff members on proper transfer and handling techniques. Also, consult with your facility's risk management department for guidance on any restrictions in assisting customers with special needs.

Complementary Products Enhance Accessibility

Once you've complied with the basic requirements of ADA there are some other options you should consider as access enhancements. In most instances these are little things but they go a long way in helping to create a more inclusive aquatic environment.

Aquatic Wheelchairs

Mobile Aquatic Chairs are essential if your facility is using a ramp, zero-depth entry or movable floor. Additionally, Mobile Aquatic Chairs support user independence by enabling self-powered travel within the pool environment. Most traditional wheelchairs are not designed for aquatic environments and can suffer potential damage when used consistently in a pool environment. When it comes to wheelchairs, it makes good sense to have a chair that's built for your environment.



Mobile Aquatic Chair (MAC)

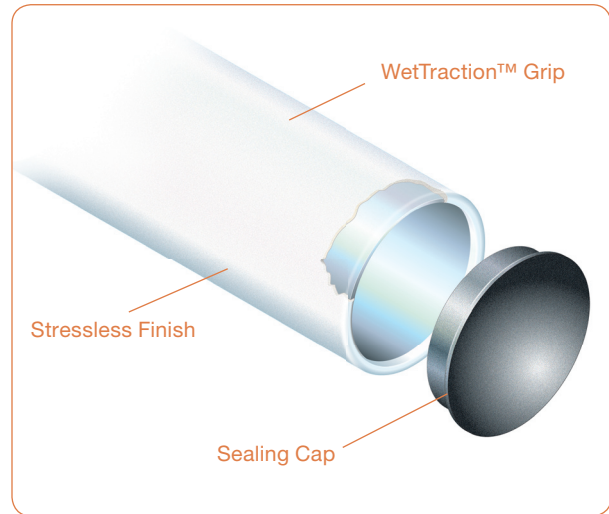
Mobile Aquatic Chairs come in a range of materials (PVC, stainless steel, powder coated stainless steel) that offer different price and performance characteristics. PVC wheelchairs are relatively inexpensive, but usually have lower weight limits and are not designed for heavy use environments. Stainless steel wheelchairs have higher weight limits, are more durable but can have corrosion issues if not properly maintained and cared for. Powder coated, stainless steel chairs carry higher weight limits and offer added protection against corrosive elements. Additionally, stability is something that should also be considered. In most instances, when traversing a sloped ramp there is a tendency for the chair to pitch forward or angle back. In order to prevent this type of unwanted motion, look for a Mobile Aquatic Chair with additional stabilizer wheels.

Seating is another important characteristic of Mobile Aquatic Chairs. Mesh seats are inexpensive but can be difficult for users to get in/out of and offer little stability. A molded seat provides a stable platform that can be used for transfer support.

Handrails

Railings and grab bars are essential support items around an aquatic facility, whether it's in the pool, along the ramp, or in the locker room. There have been significant advancements in coatings over the last several years resulting in specialty coatings that resist corrosion. In addition to resisting corrosion, these specialty coatings also offer improved grip and extra stability. The special needs population in most instances will not have the same gripping power as a traditional customer which makes a wet handrail a potential challenge.

Several manufacturers make grip tape or sleeves that can be applied to installed handrails, but if you are having new rails installed, look to have them encased in one of these new vinyl coatings that offers enhanced grip and corrosion resistance.



SealedSteel Hand Rails

Back-Up Battery

Lastly, if you have a battery powered lift it is always a good idea to have a spare back-up battery on the charger so you can limit lift downtime. Switching batteries on most electronic lifts is quick & easy.



Lift Battery