



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Regional Loan Center  
3333 North Central Avenue  
Phoenix, AZ 85012  
Website: <http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/phoenixlgy/index.htm>

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## Loan Guaranty Informational Bulletin 26-02-06

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### **SUBJ: INSPECTIONS FOR SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING (SAH)**

The purpose of this release is to review the procedures the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Compliance Inspectors are required to follow when inspecting properties with Specially Adapted Housing features.

#### **What is the assignment procedure?**

Our staff selects an inspector based on the location of the property. The inspector is informed of the assignment by letter accompanied by the VA approved plans and specifications.

#### **What are the basic requirements for compliance inspectors of SAH features in new construction?**

- Insure construction is in full compliance with VA approved plans and specifications.
- Report findings on VA Form 26-1839, Compliance Inspection Report. Send copies 1 through 3 to VA, provide copy 4 to the builder, and retain copy 5 for your records.
- Any substitutions or deviations from the approved plans and specifications must be reported on your inspection report. Also, the changes must be reported on VA Form 26-1844, signed by all interested parties to the contract, and approved by VA.
- Submit photographs of significant SAH features such as ramps, lifts, remodeled bathroom, etc. Include photos of the house or addition at each construction stage.

### **What Specially Adapted Housing features should the inspector insure are properly built?**

The following list provides general guidelines concerning the most common SAH features. Inspectors are responsible for insuring that construction complies with the plans and specifications. They may find that the plans and specifications deviate from some of the guidelines below. *Unless these deviations have been approved by VA, all discrepancies must be addressed in the Compliance Inspector's inspection report to VA.*

#### **Ramps**

If access to a dwelling requires ramps and platforms, then:

- The ramp must be permanently installed and the degree of slope must not exceed 8%.
- The ramp must be a minimum 3'6" wide. If the heights and length of the ramp(s) presents a potential hazard, then railings must be provided. The recommended height of railings is between 30 and 32 inches.
- Ramp platforms must be generous in area to allow for turning the wheelchair and equipment. A platform must precede the ramp, be a minimum of 5' x 5' and be flush with the interior floor level for wheelchair access. A maximum threshold height of ½ inch is permissible.
- Ramp(s) must terminate onto a wheelchair friendly surface. The width should be no less than 4' wide. For safety purposes, the length and directions of the surface shall be at the veteran's discretion.

#### **Doorways**

- Doorways in proposed construction shall be [at least] 36" wide.
- Doorways in existing construction shall be [at least] 32" wide.

#### **Hallways**

- Hallways for proposed construction must be a minimum of 48" wide.
- Hallways for existing construction must be a minimum of 42" wide.

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### **Carpeting**

- Carpeting should not impede wheelchair maneuverability. Carpeting selected should be low pile and closely knit.

### **Veteran's Bathroom**

The following specially adapted features are required:

- Clear 5' turning radius.
- Grab bars are required alongside water closet; inside the specially adapted shower and/or bathtub. The suggested installation height is 2'9".
- Finished floor surface must be a non-slip material when either wet or dry.
- Lavatory must be wheelchair accessible. Exposed plumbing must be sheathed to protect against accidental burns.
- Shower Stall Units
  1. Insure wheelchair accessibility. No curb, lips, or barriers between the floor of the shower and the bathroom floor is permissible.
  2. Shower unit floor surface must be of a non-slip and non-skid material.
  3. Minimum interior dimensions should be 4' x 4' without a permanent seat. Should a permanent (built-in) seat be included, then the 4' x 4' measurements begins beyond the seat.
  4. Adequate thermostatic controls must be installed to avoid sudden water temperature changes.
  5. Adequate grab bars must be installed.
  6. Shower stall openings must comply with applicable door width requirements.

### **Bathtub Units**

- Adequate grab bars are required.

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- Adequate thermostatic controls must be installed to avoid sudden water temperature changes.
- Faucets must be accessible during immersion.
- Unit floor surfaces must be non-slip and non-skid, wet or dry.

### **Water Closet**

- Adequate functional grab bars must be installed alongside water closet.
- When the water closet and lavatory are located on the same wall, adequate separation must exist between the fixtures. A 4' separation is recommended between the water closet's centerline and the edge of lavatory.

### **Smoke Detector**

- At least one smoke detector must be installed near the veteran's bedroom.

### **What are some specific examples of non-compliance with SAH features?**

- It was observed during an inspection of new construction that a "lip" existed from bathroom floor into shower stall, making it inaccessible to the veteran. Plans require that a roll-in shower have no "lip" to impede the veteran's access by wheelchair.
- Plans called for a level platform at the entry to allow the veteran to open and close door. If no platform exists, or it is not large enough, then the veteran will have difficulty stabilizing the wheelchair and opening the door.
- If no railing exists or is poorly constructed, then the veteran could fall and chance of injury is significantly increased. Plans must require railings alongside ramps.
- Since VA no longer requires fire retardant material for exterior ramp construction, it is essential that the veteran be able to quickly exit in a fire emergent situation. Plans must call for a wheelchair friendly surface at the ramp's terminus.
- Plans should call for the width of ramps to be not less than 42 inches. This dimension is defined as the inside width measurement [between the railings].

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Plans call for “flush” transitions at the two designated wheelchair emergency ingress/egress points (a threshold height of not more than ½” is allowed). Anything higher than ½” causes the threshold to be a barrier to safe passage.

- As the width of an average wheelchair is between 27” and 29”, the veteran will need a minimum turning radius of 5’ to adequately and safely maneuver.
- Plans call for the finished floor surface in the adapted bathroom to be non-skid and non-slip, when wet or dry. Highly glossed/polished ceramic tile or waxed linoleum surfaces present safety issues for the veteran and his/her caregiver.

### **Summary**

We appreciate the quality of service that you provide for veterans and VA. You have an important role in the SAH grant process. Hopefully, our efforts will result in a little more comfort in the lives of severely disabled veterans. We ask that you continue to insure that the construction complies with approved plans and specifications and to notify us immediately of any non-compliance.

### **Questions?**

Please call the Construction and Valuation Section at (602) 627-3050; toll-free 1-(888) 869-0194.

//Signed//

Robert Johnson  
Loan Guaranty Officer

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