

# Ohio **ENGINEER**

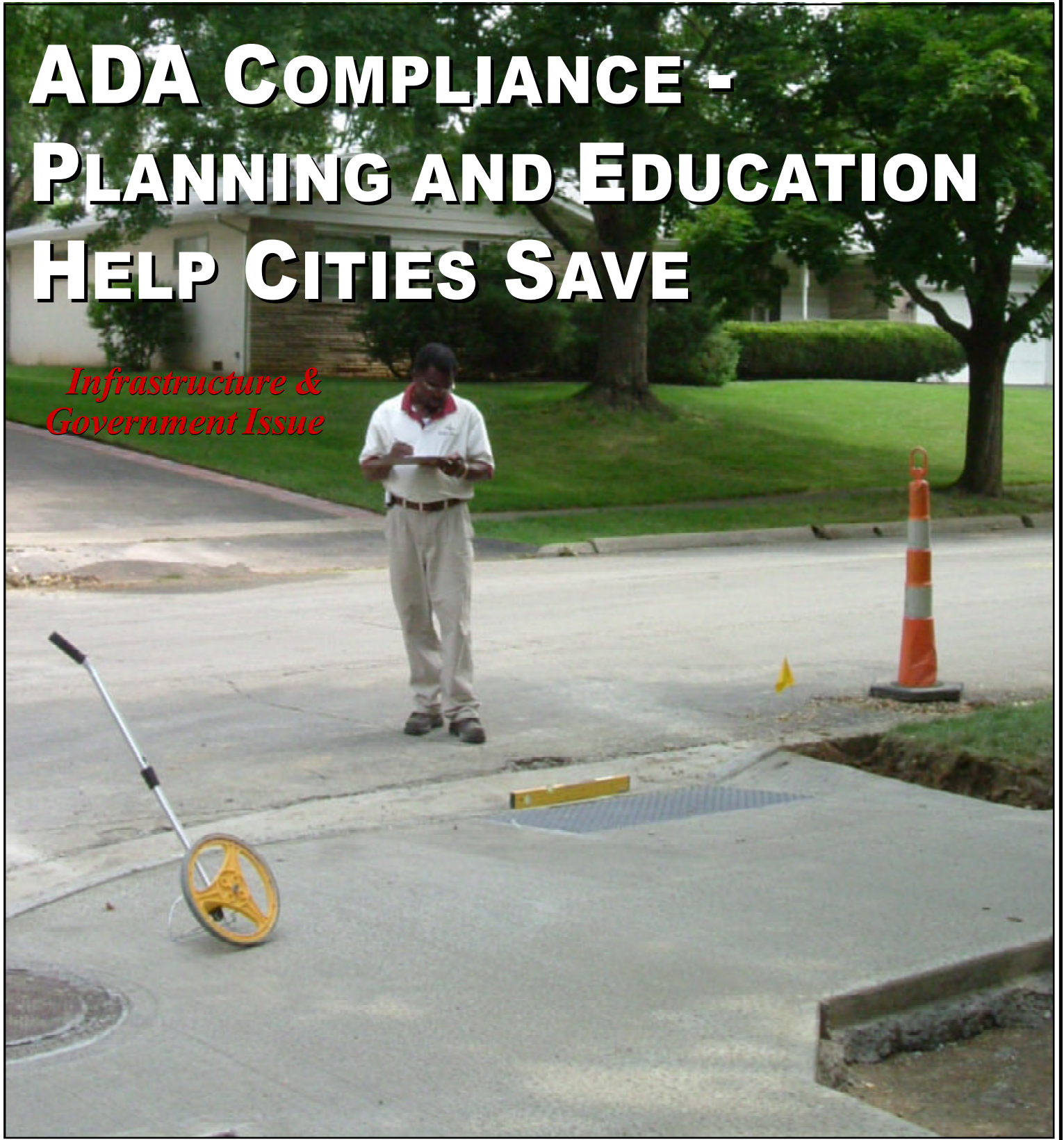
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## **ADA COMPLIANCE - PLANNING AND EDUCATION HELP CITIES SAVE**

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# ADA Compliance -- Planning and Education Help Cities Save



Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has received a swell of attention, and H.R. Gray sees a trend that projects even greater prominence for city officials, advocacy groups and disabled individuals.

Curb ramps are just one of many ADA compliance issues facing city officials today. While standard drawings make curb ramps seem like a simple fix, the ADA's intricacies can leave city officials' best designed and most monitored projects completed, yet still out of compliance.

While curb ramps are the example for this purpose, applying the same principles to any ADA compliance project can help a team troubleshoot and plan accurately—ultimately saving valuable time and money.

## 1. The ADA is often misunderstood.

The ADA is a disability rights law that leaves many (often ambiguous) decisions to local officials and design engineers. Attempting

to make decisions without the help of qualified experts can result in a misguided direction of budget and resources.

In one instance, city officials were left scratching their heads when trying to install an ADA compliant curb ramp while contending with an elaborate boulder garden, which was on private property and sat in the right-of-way.

The officials were puzzled over the complex situation and consulted with H.R. Gray to solve this intersection's ramp compliance challenge. H.R. Gray recommended the officials widen the city's right of way, which would then accommodate wider crosswalks and ramps to be installed around the boulder garden.

Since the ADA states "reasonable accommodations" must be made in regards to renovations for ADA compliance, building a ramp outside of the boulder garden, rather than through it, was determined to be a reasonable accommodation by city officials and the local ADA advocates.

An ADA compliant curb ramp was installed where there previously was none, and the city was able to avoid the costly acquisition of private property to make the ramp compliant.

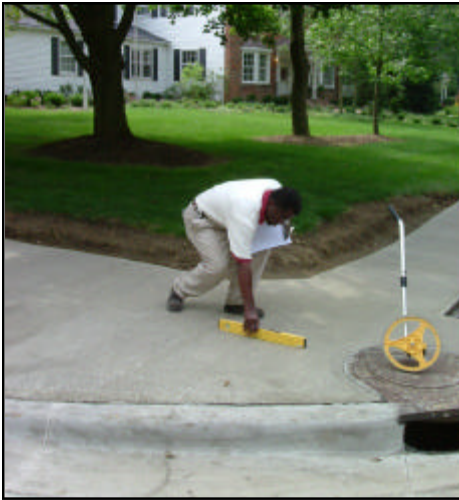
## Did you know?

- ◆ ADA compliance (and curb ramp designs) are different for the blind and the physically handicapped.
- ◆ Simply installing ramps is not good enough.
- ◆ The law defers to local officials to determine what makes a reasonable accommodation. This is open to many angles of interpretation.
- ◆ If no one has raised issues with a community's ADA accessibility to date, the door is still open for future lawsuits.
- ◆ Local advocacy groups can be a partner in successful ADA compliance projects.
- ◆ Trusted experts can help define "reasonable accommodations," assisting all parties in coming to a satisfactory resolution.

## 2. There are no standard corners.

If a city's standard drawing for curb ramps consists of one example, that particular design cannot possibly be correctly applied to each curb in that community. Trees, slope difference, signs, fire hydrants, inlets, utility poles and other variables will affect the design of a curb ramp for that particular location.

Many cities around the United States have recognized the uniqueness of curbs and have created several standard drawings (Columbus



**Construction inspector Chris Duru takes measurements of the cross slope of a curb ramp in Upper Arlington, OH.**

has 13) to categorize different varieties of curb ramps for application on a case-by-case basis.

Each of Columbus' 13 standard drawings is used for guidance only. When the time comes to create a curb ramp, the chosen standard drawing is modified in the field to fit that particular need. Remember, curb ramps consist of a ramp, landing and flares, each having specified cross-slopes and running slopes. One without the other leads to non-compliance.

By treating each project as unique, engineers and city officials can build upon past experiences and continually improve accessibility for all ADA compliance projects.

### **3. Educate the entire team before an ADA compliance undertaking.**

One main culprit in unsuccessful ADA compliance projects is disconnect among involved parties. While the city engineer may be well-read on ADA compliance,

such knowledge may not translate through to the design engineer, contractor and inspectors.

Before embarking on a compliance project, invest in an ADA compliance training course for your team. They exist, and they provide valuable knowledge on specifically what makes a specific project ADA compliant.

Starting an ADA compliance project with all players having the same knowledge can help reduce questions and variances as the design and installation move forward.

### **4. Keep ADA a high priority, regardless of the project.**

Curb ramps are only one example of how the ADA impacts the public domain.

For any project, it pays to have complete understanding of the ADA's policy on that particular feature before design, planning and execution. By translating H.R. Gray's experience with curb ramps into another scenario, the basic formula can still be applied.

#### **The key points to remember:**

- ◆ For projects in question, utilizing ADA advocacy groups as a partner in any project will help ensure a successful end result. Bringing them into the project as early as possible prevents potential pitfalls as the project is completed.
- ◆ When forming a team to complete a project, invest in educating all players in ADA compliance as it relates to a specific project. If everyone on the team has the same compliance goal, mistakes are difficult to

miss and a successful outcome is highly likely.

- ◆ Finally, treat every project as unique. As there are no exactly-the-same corners in the world of curb ramps, each project is its own. By thoroughly researching similar previous projects, one can learn from mistakes, take positive examples, and create a guide for moving forward.

Remembering the uniqueness of each, and following the above reminders can create a method that saves design flaws, and ultimately resources in the future.

**Contact Dave Haugh at 330-379-3200 or visit H.R. Gray & Associates online at [www.hrga.com](http://www.hrga.com).**

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**tional leader in Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Curb Ramp Consulting Services. These services include ADA Accessibility Compliance Audits, Barrier Removal Project Development and Oversight and Curb Ramp Design and Construction Training. Their services assure compliance with ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) and other standards for accessibility design.**