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23 and counting: More NYC hotels settle with DOJ

Two more hotels in New York City theater district have reached agreements with the US Department of Justice (DOJ) – one voluntarily, one not. The settlements are the latest actions in the ongoing Compliance Review initiative that began in May 2005 when the US Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York announced the review of 48 hotels in the Theater District in New York City. In his announcement of the enforcement activity US Attorney David Kelly noted that initiative was not in response to a specific complaint against any of the hotels, but as part of the government’s statutory responsibility to review compliance with federal law.

According to DOJ, 18 of the hotels have resolved their issues through voluntary settlement agreements and five were resolved by consent decrees after lawsuits were filed in January 2009. According to DOJ, the hotels that were sued all had “significant barriers to accessibility, and all were unresponsive to the Department’s efforts to negotiate settlement agreements with them.”

In the most recent activity, the Edison Hotel entered into a voluntary settlement agreement with DOJ. In November, the hotel agreed to create 24 fully accessible guest rooms, 12 with roll-in showers and an additional 40 guest rooms that are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. When asked why the hotel was being required to make 24 guestrooms accessible, which is more in line with a new construction standard than a requirement for an existing facility, DOJ spokesman Alejandro Miyar said, “The parties to the Edison Hotel settlement agreed it was readily achievable to renovate 24 rooms so that they may be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.”

In other action, the federal court in Manhattan approved a consent decree between the Hotel Carter and DOJ. Under the decree, which was approved in October, the hotel will to pay a \$20,000 civil fine, create 13 accessible guest rooms, four with roll in showers, and 40 rooms that are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Design Challenge: A Welcoming Hotel Front Desk

How do you make a hotel registration desk accessible, attractive and not stigmatizing?

TIP: Pahl Architecture, PC Architects/Planners in Denver designed a two-level registration desk at the Embassy Suites-Denver International Airport that is accessible, attractive and inviting. The desk blends seamlessly with the lobby design that includes native stone. Project Architect George A. Snode, AIA, ASID, notes that the general manager has said she finds most people gravitating to the lowered portion of the desk. “It’s less foreboding and intimidating,” says Snode.

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