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New fare barriers are ADA compliant with 40-inch wide wheelchair access.

Metro ADA Rules Apply to Employees, Patrons

- Chip Hazen conducts classes to instruct employees about ADA Compliance

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(August 11, 2009) No one really knows how many Metro employees or patrons have physical or emotional disabilities, and according to ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen, that's exactly the way it should be.

By law, an employer is not allowed to discuss an employee's disability with other employees. The federal confidentiality laws are very strict in this area.

Hazen, who has studied the American Disabilities Act for years, conducts periodic classes to educate Metro employees about important rules related to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In his class, Hazen focuses on the important rules for Metro employees to follow when working or dealing with Metro employees or patrons who have a vision, mobility, hearing, speech or other disability.

So prominent has ADA compliance become across the nation, Hazen notes, that Congress recently amended the ADA Act to further clarify a disability as being "anything that limit's a person's major life activity." For example, if a person is limited from eating, hearing, drinking, talking and even working, the person falls under the ADA category.

Learning about ADA rules is more important today as Metro's employment numbers grow and ridership increases, Hazen notes.

In 2003, Metro had some 10,000 wheelchair boardings per month

compared to the 44,000 it has today. Between 70,000 to 100,000 people ride Metro buses and trains using a Los Angeles County Transportation Operator's Association ID card which entitles riders, many with a disability, to ride at a reduced fare. In addition, another 77,000 patrons are currently registered in the ADA Paratransit Program.



Tether strap program secures wheelchair riders on buses.

Using proper etiquette

When dealing with employees or patrons with a disability, some rules pertain to proper etiquette, Hazen explains.

For example, when you speak to someone who is blind, it is important to make face-to-face contact with them because if you turn away, they may not hear you or know you are addressing them.

Maintaining a normal volume in your tone of voice is also important since raising your volume doesn't make them understand any better.

"Always ask, 'May I help you?' or 'What kind of help would you like?' That's very important too because not all people who are blind, need help," he said.

If you see a person using a service animal or guide dog, don't run up to pet the animal since it may interfere with the animal's ability to assist the person.

Some of the rules are clear while others are not, he explains.

Compliance encompasses everyday living

Hazen notes that not everyone knows that a City of Los Angeles ordinance states that if a person with a disability asks to use a restroom of an employee, and there is a restroom in the Metro facility, the agency is required to allow them to use it.



Safety berms to prevent falls were installed on the Metro Gold Line

ADA compliance now also includes Metro publications and websites. "You'll see a lot more of this coming out. If you want to put anything on the web, you have to create it in an accessible format," he said.

In addition to teaching the course, Hazen oversees projects associated with ADA compliance on Metro's trains, buses and property. Some of the important changes Metro has made include having buses call out stops for patrons; providing ramps, and properly working chairlifts; instituting a tether strap program used as a tool by bus operators to more safely and easily secure wheelchair users; and the installation of rail platform barriers to alert riders with vision impairments where the area is between the rail cars and that this area is not the doorway to board the train.

And most recently, Hazen is ensuring that the installation of the wheelchair accessible turnstiles on Metro's rail lines is compliant with the federal and state accessibility rules and regulations. "We do a number of different things for our customers for accommodations," he said.

Hazen encourages employees to learn more about the ADA rules, and reminds them that the most important rule is to treat people with disabilities like they would anyone else – with respect and courtesy.