



Health, Safety and Welfare

Every decision an interior designer makes in one way or another affects the health, safety and welfare of the public. Those decisions include specifying furniture, fabrics and carpeting that comply with fire codes and space planning that provides proper means of egress. Additionally, interior designers deal with accessibility issues, ergonomics, lighting, acoustics and design solutions for those with special needs.

Fire Safety

Interior materials play a major part in supporting flames or toxicity. Statistics prove that more people die in fires as a result of inhaling toxic fumes and smoke than from the flames themselves. Architects are not always involved when interior furnishings and materials are selected. Many public and commercial spaces are finished by an interior designer long after an architect is involved. Additionally, residences utilizing an interior designer seldom involve an architect. Interior designers are specially trained in interior materials and their properties, including flammability and toxicity and are uniquely qualified to select interior finishes that comply with local, state and national fire codes.

Interior designers are also charged with establishing and maintaining proper means of egress that comply with code. Additionally, audible and visible fire alarm systems and emergency exit lighting must be planned into public areas.

Accessibility

Trained and qualified interior designers study and implement accessibility codes and guidelines daily. In space planning, interior detailing and specifications and the implementation of accessibility codes and guidelines are essential. Space must be allowed for the proper turning radius of a wheelchair and telephone, electrical outlets, call buttons, etc., must be specified at an appropriate height for an individual in a wheelchair to access them. Additionally, hardware specifications must provide for individuals without the full use of their limbs.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is a growing concern in the workplace. It is the obligation of qualified interior designers to design workspaces that are ergonomic and functional. Interior designers create ergonomic workspaces by providing adjustable chairs, tables and footrests. An environment that provides the occupant with the ability to adjust his or her space to his or her own needs can prevent problems such as repetitive motion strain.

Special Needs of the Elderly

According to the National Safety Council, the leading cause of death in the home—falls—took the lives of 15,400 people in 2001. More than 60 percent of these people are 65 years old or older. Understanding environmental needs for the aged has become a special design imperative for this century. In the year 2000, people 65 years of age or older numbered 35 million or almost 13% of the population; this number is expected to more than double to about 70 million people by 2030. Interior designers are creating environments that focus on the special needs of seniors and prevent possibly fatal injuries by selecting safe furniture, adding railings and grab bars where necessary and specifying non-skid surfaces.