



Accessible Single-Occupant Bathrooms

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Single-occupant bathrooms are provided to meet the fixture requirements in small facilities, for convenience of location in larger facilities, for privacy issues or where required by the building code.

Where Provided

For accessibility, the 2006 *International Building Code* (IBC) provisions state that each separate toilet or bathroom provided is required to be accessible. Section 1109.2 includes four exceptions.

In a toilet room that is accessed only through a private office, the room must still be sized to allow for accessibility. However, there are provisions for the door, water closet, grab bars and lavatory that allow for a level of adaptability through minimal alterations to make the toilet room fully accessible if the person using the office needs it. While not specifically addressed, if this private bathroom also includes a shower, it is reasonable to allow for the future installation of grab bars and a seat in the shower.

In Institutional and Residential occupancies, if dwelling units or sleeping units are exempted by Section 1107 from the requirements of Accessible units, Type A units

or Type B units, the bathrooms that serve those units are also exempted. For example, bathrooms that serve hotel rooms which are not required to be Accessible units are not required to have accessible features. Section 1002.11 of the 2003 edition of ICC A117.1, *Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities*, requires the same vanity counter space in accessible bathrooms that is provided in non-accessible bathrooms.

When multiple single-occupant bathrooms are clustered, 50 percent are required to be accessible. “Clusters” are toilet rooms accessed from the same area or space, not toilet rooms dispersed throughout an area. Keep in mind that when the code requires separate facilities for men and women, this exception would not be permitted for two adjacent single-occupant toilet rooms that were designated as separate-sex toilet rooms. Drug testing centers are an example of where several single-occupant bathrooms would be clustered immediately adjacent to or across the hall from one another. Half of those bathrooms could be designed to meet the minimum fixture clearances in the code rather than the additional clearances required for accessibility. Signage should indicate the accessible bathrooms.

Per IBC Section 1107.5.3.1, toilet rooms that serve critical care or intensive care rooms in a hospital are not required to have accessible bathrooms even if the rooms are part of the 10 percent of the accessible rooms required. The reason is that in these situations either all patients are too ill or injured to use the water closet without assistance from staff, or the water closet is only used by staff to empty bed pans.

Section 1109.2, Exception 4, addresses men’s toilet rooms. If only one urinal is provided, it is not required to meet the clearance, height and operable parts requirements of ICC A117.1. Because the code never allows all water closets in a bathroom to be exchanged for urinals, there will still always be at least one accessible stall in the same toilet room.

Where Required

There are three situations in the IBC where single-occupant toilet/bathing rooms are required. The first, given in Section 1109.2.1, is in large assembly and mercantile occupancies where the code requires six or more water closets—including urinals exchanged for water



closets—for both the men and women combined (in mixed occupancies, only the fixtures serving the assembly or mercantile should be considered). When this number is reached, a single-occupant toilet room must be provided in addition to the required accessible fixtures in the men’s and women’s toilet rooms. The intent is to allow for situations where a person who needs assistance to use the bathroom cannot comfortably use the separate-sex facilities. Examples are a man using a wheelchair who needs assistance from his wife to transfer, a father assisting his young daughters or a mother assisting her teenage son whose arm is in a cast. This intent will be further reinforced in the 2009 IBC, in which these bathrooms will be called “Family/Assisted Use Bathrooms.”

While the code typically does not allow for unisex bathrooms to count toward the required fixture count, Section 2902.1.1 permits this bathroom to count as one of the required fixtures for either men or women. A common question is when more than one of these facilities would be required in a very large building such as a football stadium or large concert hall. The answer is given in the location requirements in Section



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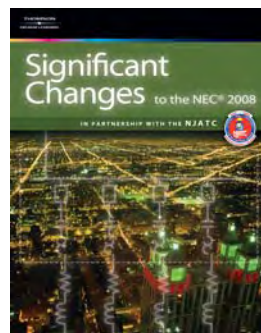
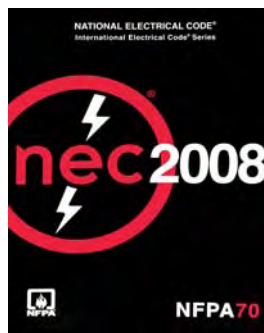
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Single-Occupant Bathrooms (continued)

1109.2.1.4, which indicate that the unisex bathroom must be located a maximum of 500 feet and one story from the men's and women's bathrooms. The code has similar location limitations for the separate-sex facilities (Section 2902.4.1 and Section 2902.4.2). This travel

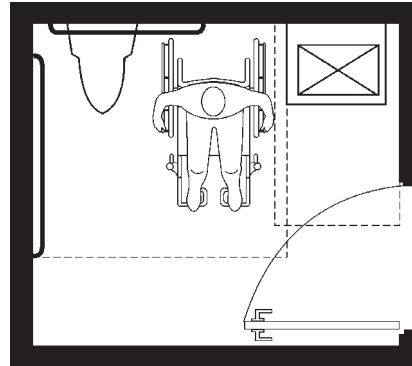


Figure 1. The clear floor space where someone sits to use the lavatory can overlap the clear floor space for the water closet, but the lavatory and any counter cannot overlap the water closet space.

distance limit could result in additional unisex bathrooms being required. The code also dictates that in transportation facilities, these unisex toilet rooms should not require passing through a security checkpoint. This is a good thing to keep in mind as more types of facilities install such security measures.

The second situation where single-occupant toilet/bathing rooms are required by the code is in recreational facilities where separate-sex facilities are provided with more than one shower in each bathroom. In such instances, a separate room must be provided that includes a shower, water closet and lavatory. Again, the intent is to allow for assistance from opposite-sex attendants. This would be especially important for people who come to the recreational facility for rehabilitation exercises. Because this feature is viewed as very customer friendly, many new community recreation centers are voluntarily providing family locker rooms that include several unisex bathing rooms off of the main locker areas.

The third situation is in existing buildings where it is technically infeasible to alter the separate-sex facilities to meet new construction requirements. In this situation, Section 3409.8.9 requires that a unisex toilet room be provided. There is an additional limitation that the uni-sex toilet room must be on the same floor and in the same area as the separate-sex bathrooms. Where

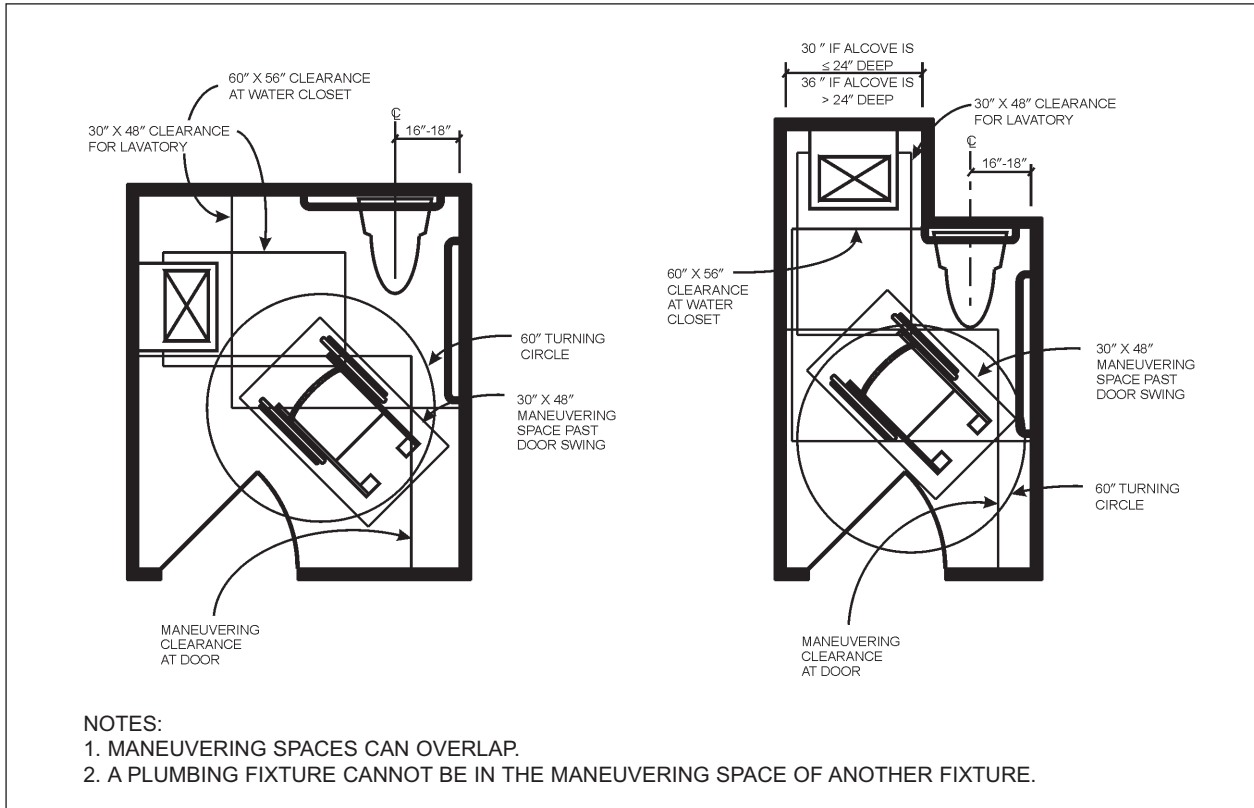


Figure 2. Example designs for meeting ICC A117.1 accessibility requirements for single-occupant toilet rooms.

this is technically infeasible, Section 3409.6 requires that the separate-sex bathrooms be altered to be as accessible as possible.

In all situations, signage should be provided at the separate-sex toilet rooms indicating the location of accessible unisex toilet rooms.

Technical Requirements

Chapter 6 of ICC A117.1 provides the technical requirements for bathrooms for the public or employees and is referenced by Section 1002.11 for Accessible dwelling units. ICC A117.1 Section 1003.11 and Section 1004.11 include bathroom requirements specific to Type A and Type B dwelling units, respectively. The explanation for technical requirements provided here are for the Chapter 6 requirements.

The key thing to remember is that while the clear floor space where someone sits to use the lavatory can overlap the clear floor space for the water closet, the lavatory and any counter cannot overlap the water closet space. The intent is to allow for a side transfer to the

water closet. This is needed for persons who cannot perform a front transfer due to limited or no use of their legs, and works much smoother for persons who need transfer assistance. A turning space is required within the room, but it can use the knee and toe clearances under the lavatory. Due to the tightness of the room, the approach to the door maneuvering clearances may be a somewhat interpretive (see Figure 1).

Some designers and owners have concerns about the size of single-occupant bathrooms. Figure 2 illustrates two options that meet the ICC A117.1 requirements which allow for a tighter room. Specific dimensions are not indicated because the size of lavatories varies so much.

Accessible bathrooms, while sized based on wheelchair access, actually can benefit a much larger percentage of the population. Several large mercantile chains have already incorporated the “family bathrooms” into their standard design plans and many family-oriented concerns such as zoos, museums, convention centers and airports have also embraced this feature. ♦