



Canadian  
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# Best practices for indoor relief areas for service dogs in terminals



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# Introduction

Some persons with disabilities use service dogs to provide disability-related assistance during their daily living and to be able to travel independently. When a person with disabilities using a service dog travels, the service dog needs to be relieved, whether the person is waiting to depart, or arriving after a long journey.

The [Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations](#) require terminal operators to provide a designated service dog relief area located outside the terminal as well as a designated relief area on the secure side of the terminal, which can be reached by means of a path of travel that is accessible to persons with disabilities and that does not require the person to exit and re-enter the secure area.

## Purpose

While outdoor relief areas do not pose many challenges, constraints such as space and surface make it more challenging to design indoor relief areas. The purpose of this guide is to provide best practices for terminal operators, to assist them in designing relief areas on the secure side that could best meet the needs of persons who travel with service dogs and their dogs.

The Guide focuses on six areas of best practices regarding planning, designing and maintaining indoor relief areas for service dogs.

Note: For information about a transportation service provider's obligations to accommodate persons who travel with a service dog, please refer to [Service Dogs – A Guide](#).

# Best Practices

## Location

A relief area should be accessible for all persons with disabilities travelling with service dogs, including for persons using a wheelchair.

- A relief area should be located in a reasonably quiet area away from loud noise and other distractions.
- It should not be co-located with a designated smoking area.
- An indoor relief area is preferable, but where an outdoor relief area is the only option on the secure side of the terminal:
  - It should be fenced in and secure;
  - it should have a door leading specifically to the relief area that opens to an area that is fenced for the safety of the dog and the handler;
  - it should have some form of shelter or roof as protection from the elements such as sun, rain and snow; and
  - If the relief area is located close to operating aircraft, the area should be protected from heavy winds generated by jet blast and prop wash.
- In larger airports, where there can be significant distances between gates, terminal operators should consider having more than one relief area in each terminal to allow service dogs to be relieved between flights, especially when there is a short connecting time between flights.

## Design Features

- Where possible, the relief areas should be 7.4 square meters (3 meters in diameter), and be designed to enable a service dog handler to allow a dog on a 1.5 meter leash to circle its handler prior to relieving itself.

- Where space constraints makes it impossible to have a relief area that meets the recommended dimensions, the space should at least be large enough for the dog to be able to walk back and forth in front of its handler.
- If the relief area is in a large open area, it is preferable to at least have knee-high barriers around three sides of the relief area, as it helps the dog be less distracted and enables them to relieve themselves more quickly.
- If a box is being used, the size of the box should be 1.2 meters by 2.4 meters, the frame should be approximately 100 mm by 100 mm. A box of this size does not have sufficient space for any other structures such as fire hydrants, as the entire floor space must be clear for the service dog and its handler.
- Where a box is being used, it is acceptable if the box is covered in a plastic sheeting and the sheeting is covered with wood chips.
- If the relief area is in a closed area, such as its own room, it is recommended to have the ability to lock the door to allow for only one dog to be in the area at a time to avoid any distraction from other dogs. Given the limited time that can be available between flights, preventing any situation that distracts the dog from relieving itself is helpful.
- Where the relief areas are accessed through a door, it is recommended to have push-button door openers for easy access.
- For security and safety, doors into the relief area should have a window or other means that allows a person with vision to see into or out of the relief area.
- Having features, such as fire hydrants, in the relief area is not useful for service dogs as they are trained to squat to relieve themselves. In fact, they can be a distraction for the dogs and may even be a trip hazard or an impediment to the handler's movement in the area.
- If features like fire-hydrants are included in the design, given that they may be useful to pets who may also use the relief area, they should be placed in a

manner which prevents them from creating a barrier for service dogs and their handlers, such as in a corner.

- Where there are amenities such as faucets or water stations in relief areas, the controls should be easy to operate and easily reachable by a person who uses a wheelchair.
- Having shelving in a relief area will allow for easy storage of backpacks or carry-on items and will make the use of relief areas both more efficient and hygienic.

## Surface

- For the surface of relief areas, hard surfaces, such as cement and asphalt, are the preferred options as most guide dogs are trained to relieve themselves on hard surfaces, roads and driveways. A hard surface also makes it easier for handlers to pick up after their dogs. A tiled surface is not recommended as it closely resembles indoor flooring that guide dogs are trained to not relieve themselves on.
- Where cement is used for hard surfaces in the relief area, the cement should be the same texture as used for sidewalks and not glossy, to prevent the dogs or the owners from slipping, especially if a hose is available for flushing the urine down the slope to the drain.
- For soft surfaces, wood chips, mulch, or pea gravel are some materials that are preferred, and may be appropriate for relief areas where the handler does not need to go onto the surface. However, this may not always be feasible due to constraints faced by terminals related to hygiene and cleanliness, and agricultural requirements in airports with US Customs and Border pre-clearance facilities, which restrict the use of natural materials.
- Ideally, where there is space to do so, having a mix of hard and soft surfaces is a good option. It will meet the needs of dogs that prefer hard surfaces and those that prefer soft ones. However, this may not always be feasible due to space

constraints faced by terminals, as well as the hygiene and agricultural constraints noted above.

- While artificial grass, such as AstroTurf, seems to be the most commonly used surface in many terminals, it is generally not preferred by service dog users as most dogs are trained to relieve themselves on hard surfaces. Artificial turf resembles a carpet, and as service dogs are trained not to relieve themselves on carpet, they may be reluctant to relieve themselves on artificial grass.
- Where artificial grass is the only surface option, terminals should make every effort to keep it clean and replace it as needed. If a puppy pad is used beneath the artificial grass, the pad should be replaced at regular intervals to avoid poor hygiene and bad odor.
- It is not recommended to use puppy-pads themselves as the surface of the relief area.

## **Amenities**

The relief area should be equipped with the following amenities:

- Pick-up bags and a trash receptacle placed in easy to reach locations.
- Large print, well contrasted and Braille signage about usage and responsible behavior (e.g., use of pick-up bags).
- Hand washing station, or sanitizers where a hand washing station is not available.
- Where possible, potable water as a drinking water supply for the dog.

## **Signage, wayfinding and information about relief areas**

- A designated area for service dogs to relieve themselves must be identified by tactile and Braille signage, and must comply with the standards set out in the CSA B651-18 - Accessible design for the built environment, as amended from time to time.

- Signage for service dog relief area(s) should be placed throughout the terminal at key locations, such as where locator maps, information booths, and other location devices exist.
- QR codes can be added to signage to allow a person to access information on location and wayfinding, using their smart phone or other QR reader.
- Terminal personnel should be educated regularly on the location of relief areas to further assist persons with service dogs.
- Information about the location and features of relief areas should be made available on the terminal's website and in other publications that describe the layout of the terminal, as this helps people to be better prepared for their experience at the terminal.

## **Maintenance**

- The relief area should be maintained regularly in order to keep it clean and operable.
- Where mulch is being used, wet and dirty mulch can be shoveled out and replaced with dry mulch every couple of days or as needed.
- Disinfectants and cleaning products with strong odors, such as strong smelling detergents and bleach should be avoided.
- Where possible, for areas with hard surfaces such as cement, having a water source such as a hose and a good drainage system, preferably graded at one end, will make cleaning easier.

## **Consultation**

- Terminal operators should consult with one or more service dog training organizations, or an accessibility committee comprised of persons with lived experience, regarding the design and maintenance of service animal relief areas.



## Examples of existing best practices

Below are some examples of existing best practices:

- Programs that allow persons travelling with service dogs to familiarize themselves with the airport facilities, including the location and design of relief areas, such as the [Passenger Rehearsal Program](#) offered by Winnipeg airport.
- Availability of navigation apps, such as Aira, available at Toronto Pearson Airport, to assist people with wayfinding and locating the relief areas independently.
- A state of the art drainage system—handlers push a button on exit to have the area rinsed, as available at Washington Dulles Airport.
- With the help of "meet and assist" personnel, allowing for the handler to bring their dog to safely relieve itself on the tarmac, when travel is by aircraft that board and deplane on the tarmac, such as the Dash 8s, a practice that is adopted by Vancouver airport.

# Annex A

Obligations in the *Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations* regarding provision of relief areas for service dogs:

## **Designated relief area**

**227 (1)** A designated area for service dogs to relieve themselves must

**(a)** be identified by tactile and Braille signage; and

**(b)** be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis.

## **Signage**

**(2)** The terminal must have signage that indicates the direction to follow in order to access a designated relief area for service dogs.

## **Designated relief area outside terminal**

**(3)** A terminal must have a designated area for service dogs to relieve themselves that is located outside of the terminal and that a person with a disability may reach from the terminal by means of a path of travel that is accessible to persons with disabilities.

## **Direct access from restricted area**

**(4)** A terminal must have a designated area for service dogs to relieve themselves that a person with a disability may reach, from the area of the terminal into which access is strictly controlled, by means of a path of travel that is accessible to persons with disabilities and that does not require the person to exit and re-enter that area.