

Ministry of Energy 2003-2004 Accessibility Plan

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Introduction

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This document is the first annual accessibility plan for the Ministry of Energy. The plan describes improvements to accessibility that the ministry has made to date and its commitments for the balance of the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Report on Achievements

Policies

The Ministry of Energy currently has in place a ministry specific operating policy entitled "Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities". This Operating Policy, along with the Equal Opportunity and Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Operating Policies, promotes a healthy work environment where all employees are able to participate fully in all aspects of their jobs. These policies support sound human resources management and help employees be as productive as they can be.

The policy specifically provides clarification on roles and responsibilities for providing effective employment accommodation within the ministry. It applies to all aspects of employment and the workplace with a purpose to ensure that all employees with disabilities are provided with accommodation in employment, in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Injury, Illness and Employment Accommodation Program.

In addition, the Ministry of Energy successfully integrated accessibility improvements within our 2003/04 Business Plan.

Training/Learning

The ministry has conducted significant training sessions with ministry staff with the intent to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

The first of these sessions included training for all ministry managers on the ministry specific "Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities" operating policy (see Policies section for further detail). In addition, all ministry managers were asked to discuss this policy with their staff. In order to supplement the staff discussion, a Handbook including the policy was provided to all ministry staff and was also made available on the ministry intranet site to ensure new staff were familiar with the policy.

Upon the proclamation of the ODA, the ministry ensured that one hundred percent of all Ministry of Energy managers and supervisors completed ODA training. This training provided managers and supervisors with a detailed understanding of the requirements of the ODA as

well as the knowledge and understanding to interact effectively with people with disabilities. In addition, as new managers and supervisors are hired it is a requirement that they complete this training if they have not already done so.

Guidance on the procedures for responding to requests for publications in accessible formats has been made available to all ministry staff.

In addition, training was provided to the ministry web master in order to ensure an effective base of knowledge to complete improvements to the ministry internet website.

Communications

The Ministry of Energy has successfully updated its website ensuring that all content was and continues to be accessible via any user agent currently in existence as well as any user agent that complies with accessibility standards as set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). This includes screen readers, Braille devices, screen magnifiers, cell phones, personal digital assistants and text-only browsers. In addition, the ministry has added a new accessibility feature to its website. The site provides access to all major sections using simple keystrokes or "Access Keys" so that those users unable to use a mouse can easily navigate the site.

To date, the site has functioned as anticipated. All content is accessible via text browser, and has been made accessible to people with disabilities, as required under section 6 of the ODA. The changes that were made were not static in nature, in fact enhancements and improvements to the accessibility of the website are ongoing as stakeholders who utilize assistive technologies have been asked to assist with the ongoing review.

In addition, procedures are in place to provide ministry publications in accessible formats, upon request.

The ministry intranet site is currently being redesigned to enhance accessibility.

Facilities

As part of the ministry's operating policy for workplace accommodations, the ministry has recently completed several Workplace, Ergonomics, Barrier Analysis assessments of employee's workstations, equipment and the facilities in the ministry to ensure employees can work comfortably in the workplace. Through a letter from the employee's doctor, an ergonomic/barrier assessment is completed and, based on the findings of the assessment, adjustments to the work area are promptly completed. To date, all employees who have had assessments are pleased with the changes and outcomes to their work areas.

In addition, the ministry takes an active role in consulting with the building's property

management to ensure common facilities meet or exceed the Ontario Building Code and to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.

Commitments and Strategies for 2003-2004

Methods to be taken to prevent new barriers

During the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the Ministry of Energy will undertake the following activities to ensure that proposals for new acts, regulations, policies, programs and services are assessed with respect to their effect on people with disabilities:

Policies

- Review operating proposals put forward in the 2004-2005 business planning submissions to ensure accessibility is taken into consideration;
- Develop a protocol within the Corporate Services area to ensure all policies, proposals and contracts brought forward consider the perspective of people with disabilities;
- Provide guidance to policy and program development staff on how to include accessibility in proposals; and
- Develop a protocol to ensure that items brought forward under the program review exercise are also reviewed for accessibility requirements.

Training/Learning

- Ensure that those staff training programs developed by the ministry include the provisions of the ODA; and
- Ensure that all new managers, as part of their ministry orientation, complete ODA training so that the ministry maintains its 100% rating.

Communications

- Update and enhance the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Information page on the ministry Intranet site. Present information includes protocols on providing publication in alternative formats and a variety of Questions and Answers; and
- Continue to ensure that the ministry internet site is accessible, including the testing of all new site content.

Facilities

- Continue to abide by the ministry specific "Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities" operating policy requirements and ensure those staff that require specific accommodations obtain them in a timely manner; and
- Continue to work with the Ontario Realty Corporation and building management to ensure barriers identified in common areas are addressed and eliminated.

Business areas to be reviewed

Having developed strategies to ensure that new barriers are not created, the ministry is committed to ensuring that existing barriers are identified and removed. In order to accomplish this the ministry will undertake the following reviews with the purpose to first identify and then remove any identified barriers.

Acts and Regulations

The ministry will review the following acts internally to ensure the appropriate use of language with respect to people with disabilities, as well as to identify any programs established in law that may have an impact on people with disabilities

Ontario Energy Board Amendment Act (Electricity Pricing), 2003

Policies and Programs

The following policies and programs will be reviewed with the purpose to first identify and then remove any identified barriers.

Human Resources

The ministry will develop a best practices guide to ensure staff consider ODA issues when inviting people to our organization. This could be for interviews, conferences, stakeholder meetings, other ministry staff who come so we ensure that any necessary accommodation is made.

Performance Management

The ministry will conduct an internal review and update our human resource performance management policy to ensure that all management staff performance agreements include a learning component related to accessibility issues.

Program Review

The ministry will include accessibility issues when reviewing programs that are identified under the program review exercise.

Practices and Services

The following practices and services will be reviewed with the purpose to first identify and then remove any identified barriers.

Communications Practices

The ministry will:

- Conduct a review to identify all barriers in public reception areas.
- Conduct a review of the ministry intranet site to identify potential barriers to staff with disabilities.

These reviews will incorporate feedback from internal ministry stakeholders prior to implementation of findings.

Actions to be taken

In addition to conducting the aforementioned reviews, the ministry will complete the following activities within the 2003-04 fiscal year to ensure that existing barriers are identified and removed.

Barrier identification and prevention

- Conduct an anonymous employee survey to assess level of knowledge about accessibility issues among staff.
- Conduct an accessibility audit in all reception/public areas to identify communication and architectural barriers.

Improved accessibility in communications

- Upgrade the ministry intranet site so that it is fully accessible by all ministry staff.
- Ensure that the ministry call centre has a TTY line.

Improved accessibility of facilities

- Ensure that all accessible washrooms have grab bars installed.
- Ensure all hallways are lit clearly and free of clutter to allow full and safe access.

- Ensure all lighting in targeted facilities provides the optimal safety and convenience for visitors and employees with visual impairments.
- Work with building management to ensure any additional identified barriers are removed.

Improved accessibility in technology

- Ensure that all new material posted to the ministry's Internet site complies with standards for usability by people with disabilities, reflecting the broad definition of 'disability' under the ODA.
- Ensure that the learning plan for our Webmaster includes knowledge of adaptive technologies and accessible Web site design.

Improved accessibility in policies

- Update the ministry "Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities" operating policy to ensure the ODA is fully reflected and communicate this document to all ministry staff.

Improved accessibility in practices

- Ensure that ministry program managers and supervisors are given guidance on having regard to accessibility in all procurement activities, as required under section 5 of the ODA. All staff with responsibility for procurement will receive the "Guidelines for Implementing the Procurement Provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act," once distributed by Management Board Secretariat

For more information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome. Please phone:

General inquiry number: 1-800 818-2900 or in Toronto 416-326-4483

TTY number: 1-800 387-5559

E-mail: write2us@energy.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Ontario web portal at:

www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

Alternate formats of this document are available free upon request from:

Publications Ontario

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In Ottawa, call (613) 238-3630 or toll-free 1-800-268-8758

TTY Service 1-800-268-7095

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