

Hallway Systems... the New Comfort Zone

By Rob Hadden

We've all heard the old adage not to judge a book by its cover, but in the self storage industry, first impressions can make or break the sale. As the storage market continues to mature, the client's views and comfort level are of growing importance. The average renter today is educated to storage options and has shopped around; therefore he/she needs to feel at ease when entering the facility. At ease personally, and at ease that their belongings will be well preserved. The hallway and its appearance play a large role in that comfort level, and design and production are where it all starts.

First, the hall system must meet all the proper BOCA building codes along with any local codes of compliance. Usually codes reflect the height of the hall with respect to the sprinkler system or the pertinent fire suppression system in the given facility. As a rule the system must be a minimum of 18" below the sprinkler head itself (checking with the local fire marshal for specific codes is a good idea).

Second, the unit mix of the facility should be designed to optimize the percentage of rentable square footage while maintaining a good "flow" in the building. It should be designed with the larger units staying closer to the entry ways, as more trips to and from the vehicle are going to be required, and traditionally larger material will be traveling to these units (i.e. beds, refrigerators, appliances). It should be designed with as few turns and intersections as possible to make movement around the facility easier...but without sacrificing rentable square footage, of course! When intersections do occur, chamfering the corners of the intersection can be a real help for turning the carts around the corners. This will help minimize the damage to the corners from the carts and material being moved and make the turns much easier for the customer.

Giving more space at the loading and unloading areas of the facility for customer ease of movement is critical. Without this additional space both the customer and the hall system suffer. The customer gets frustrated and often in turn the hall gets damaged.

Thirdly, the cosmetics of the facility make a difference. Bright lighting not only offers warm illumination, it creates a safe feel in the building, making moving down long halls more comfortable for the clients. Using light colors in the hall can help reflect more light both in the hall and when the customers open the unit door. Soffit systems in the hall can also help create more comfort as an additional light source. Plus, they offer a finished ceiling look which is often more visually "friendly" than the industrial ceilings of some buildings.

There are two basic hallway options available, and different looks can be achieved based on personal preference. The two main options are the *flush hallway system* and the *corrugated hallway system*. The flush hallway system is constructed of typically one foot flat wall panels and flat header panels (panels above the door). The flush hallway advantage is it gives a very clean finish and deflects lots of light. However, it can tend to show damage more quickly than the corrugated option. The corrugated hallway system is constructed of corrugated panels installed vertically to create the walls of the hallway. The header is constructed of the same panel run horizontally with a trim package. This system will still deflect light, and it tends not to show damage as quickly and can also be more cost-effective in the construction.

Roll-up doors or swing doors can also affect the comfort of the customer. Using all roll-up doors in the construction will keep the hall free of obstructions, even when the doors are open. Note that all door manufacturers build a 180 degree swing door, but not all customers swing them the full 180 degrees. This can make for a safer feel, as there is no peering around open doors, and it keeps the hall clear. Maintaining a clear view for the security system at all times is another means of maintaining a safe atmosphere, which roll-up doors achieve very well.

In conclusion, hallways play a big role in meeting the basic tenant needs of safety, brightness and efficiency. Designing with the customer in mind will play a large role in the success of any new facility.

Rob Hadden is the International Marketing Manager for Janus International, a Temple, GA based manufacturer of Third Generation self storage doors and hallway systems. For more information, visit us at www.janusintl.com.