

**NC Department of Insurance  
Office of the State Fire Marshal - Engineering Division  
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**Accessible Employee Work Areas and Bartenders**

**Code:** 2012 Building Code  
**Section:** 1104.3.1

**Date:** July 1, 2015

**Question:**

We are designing several senior living communities that have bars for their Independent Living residents. To accommodate the independent living residents who use wheelchairs and those who are incapable of climbing onto or off of a higher bar stool, we have been building bars at wheelchair accessible height, with low bar stools to match. This works well for the residents but presents a design issue for the bartender, who needs to work behind a typical countertop height. The emerging standard is to lower the floor behind the bar approximately one foot so that the bartender is working at standing height and to provide steps from the main floor level to the bar working area. Is the area behind the bar required to be made accessible for a bartender?

**Answer:**

NCBC 1104.3.1 Exc. 1 exempts the common use circulation path within an employee work area from having to have an accessible route where the employee work area is less than 300 square feet in area and is defined by permanently installed partitions, counters, casework or furnishings.

Depending on the size of the work area behind the bar, this sounds ideal for a situation where the bar has been lowered in order to accommodate the users on the counter side of the bar. In larger facilities, it may require that more than one lowered bar area be provided in order to maintain the employee work area within the 300 square foot limitations behind the bar.

**Keywords:**  
accessibility