

The Right Fit

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It happens to women more often than it does to men. You walk into a clothing store and try on that that gorgeous new suit that was on display in the window. You know you wear a size 8 but when you try on the size 8 that was hanging on the rack, you either find the fabric hanging around your waist or you can't quite get the zipper to go up around your hips. You go back to the rack and select another size until you find one that fits. Why can't those darn clothing makers make a size 8 suit that fits your size 8 body?

“While apparel manufacturers refer to government-issued body measurement tables, there is no law or regulation requiring them to adhere strictly to the charts.” states a recent Wall Street Journal article, adding “Each company can subjectively interpret how big and wide a size six should be and, as a result, today's sizes are all over the map.”

And so it is with floor area measurements for leasing. BOMA publishes the most widely used Method for Measuring Floor Area in Office Buildings (ANSI/BOMA Z65.1-1996), but there are no laws in the US which require developers and landlords to follow what we refer to as the BOMA Standard. One result is that a tenant shopping for space will find that a Rentable Square Foot in one building will not provide the same utility as a Rentable Square Foot in another building, requiring them to “try on” various facilities to determine which provides the best fit at a reasonable cost.

Like clothing sizes, floor area measurement practices in the US vary widely because there are no laws or regulations driving them. Practices vary from region to region around the US, between sectors of the real estate market (office, industrial, retail and residential) and even among owners in the same market. Many owners ignore the complex BOMA Standard and elect a simpler “Gross Area” method employed by county appraisers. Others will adopt the BOMA Standard but, instead of following its complex method of allocating common areas, elect to use a single Multi-tenant R/U Ratio for all floors of the building.

All these different measurement methods can be made to work (given the right tools and good documentation) and all can be characterized as fair so long as the method is clearly communicated to prospective tenants and the tenant has the opportunity to “try on” different leaseholds to see which one provides the best fit. However, the variety of measurement practices does provide a challenge to the BOMA Method of Measuring Floor Area Committee, on which I sit.

This Committee is charged with the responsibility of reviewing the BOMA Standard every five years to ensure that it describes the most widely adopted measurement practice in North America. The last major revision was in 1996, when building-wide measurement and Building Common Areas (like entry lobbies) were incorporated. The reason the standard was changed then was that practices in the industry had already changed, and the Standard had to be updated or it would lose its relevancy.

The Committee elected not to update the BOMA Standard in 2001 because the industry was still absorbing the major changes in the 1996 revision. However, the Committee is now beginning to focus on a 2006 revision to keep the Standard squarely in the middle of current practices of measurement for office leasing. What changes will be incorporated this new BOMA Standard?

The clothing industry is undertaking a first-ever American “sizing census”, called “SizeUSA” to determine the size of American consumers. The intent is to allow you to finally walk right into that size 8 suit that you wanted. If you receive a survey from BOMA on floor area measurement practices, please respond thoughtfully. Your input will help maintain the BOMA Standard as the most useful and relevant floor area measurement standard in the Real Estate industry.

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