
Wisconsin Legislative Council

ACT MEMO



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2021 Wisconsin Act 195
[2021 Senate Bill 344]

**Interior Designers and Interior
Design Firms**

2021 Wisconsin Act 195 makes various changes to the law related to registered interior designers and interior design firms. This includes changes made to the regulation, registration eligibility requirements, scope of practice, and authority for registered interior designers to seal or stamp documents, and the requirement for interior design firms to obtain certificates of authorization.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY OVER REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Under **prior law**, the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) had specified regulatory authority related to the registration and discipline of interior designers. The regulation of architects, landscape architects, professional engineers, and professional land surveyors are regulated by sections of an examining board that is attached to DSPS, and under prior law was named the “Examining Board of Architects, Landscape Architects, Professional Engineers, and Professional Land Surveyors.”

2021 Wisconsin Act 195 transfers authority related to registered interior designers from DSPS to the new registered interior designers section of the “Examining Board of Architects, Landscape Architects, Professional Engineers, Professional Land Surveyors, and Registered Interior Designers”, which is renamed and expanded by the act.¹ In doing so, the act adds three registered interior designers and two public members to the membership of this examining board. The new interior designer section has the authority to register, renew, and reprimand registered interior designers. The registered interior designer section also has the authority to limit, suspend, or revoke an interior designer’s certificate of registration for any gross negligence or misconduct, or any gross incompetence, in the practice of interior design. Lastly, the interior designer section is required by the act to promulgate rules establishing specifications for seals and stamps used by registered interior designers.

REGISTRATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Under **prior law**, a person was eligible for registration as an interior designer if the person satisfied either of the following eligibility requirements:

- Submitted all of the following: (1) evidence of education and experience in interior design or architecture, as specified under prior law; (2) that the person does not have an arrest or conviction record, subject to the Fair Employment Law; and (3) names of at least five references, at least three of whom shall have personal knowledge of the applicant’s interior designing experience. The person was also required to pass one of the interior designer examinations required under prior law and meet any other requirement established by DPSP rule.

¹ The act accomplishes this transfer in the regulatory authority, in part, by moving the statutes related to registered interior designers from [ch. 440, subch. X, Stats.](#), to [ch. 443, Stats.](#)

- Registered as an architect and was either a graduate of a four-year architecture program or had at least six years of demonstrated practical experience in interior design of a character satisfactory to DSPS.

Under **the act**, a person must register with the interior designer section to engage in the practice of interior design and amends the criteria for being eligible to do so. Under the act, a person is eligible if the person satisfies one of the following:

- Passes an interior design examination approved by the registered interior designer section that is administered by an organization approved by the registered interior designer section and meet any other requirements established by the registered interior designer section by rule.
- Registers as an architect and is either a graduate of a four-year architecture program or has at least six years of demonstrated practical experience in interior design of a character satisfactory to the registered interior designer section, similar to prior law.

REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNER'S SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Under **prior law**, the scope of practice of interior design was “the design of interior spaces in conformity with public health, safety and welfare requirements, including the preparation of documents relating to space planning, finish materials, furnishings, fixtures and equipment and the preparation of documents relating to interior construction that does not substantially affect the mechanical or structural systems of a building. Interior design specifically excluded services that constituted the practice of architecture or the practice of professional engineering.”

The act expands the scope of the practice of interior design in three ways. Specifically, the act adds the following to the scope of the practice of interior design: (1) the design of interior spaces as part of an interior alteration or interior construction project;² (2) the preparation of documents relating to building code descriptions, project egress plans that require no increase in the number of exits in the space affected; and (3) the preparation of interior technical submissions³ relating to interior construction. The act also specifies that the following are excluded from the scope of practice of interior design:

- Services that constitute the practice of architecture or the practice of professional engineering. These services were also excluded from the scope under prior law.
- Altering or affecting the structural system of a building, including changing the building's live or dead load on the structural system.
- Changes to the building envelope, including exterior walls, exterior wall coverings, exterior wall openings, exterior windows and doors, architectural trim, balconies and similar projections, bay and

² The act defines “interior alteration or interior construction project” to mean a project for an interior space or area within a proposed or existing building or structure, including construction, modification, renovation, rehabilitation, or historic preservation, that involves changing or altering any of the following: (a) the design function or layout of rooms; (b) the state of permanent fixtures or equipment; (c) the interior space or area if the change or alteration requires verification of the compliance of the interior space or area with a building code, fire code, the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, or state or local regulations; (d) interior furnishings; or (e) nonstructural elements of the interior space or area.

³ The act defines “interior technical submission” to mean a design, drawing, specification, study, or other technical report or calculation that establishes the scope of an interior design project, including a description of standards of quality for materials, skilled labor, equipment, and construction systems, and that may be signed and sealed by a Wisconsin registered interior designer in compliance with the law.

oriel windows, roof assemblies and rooftop structures, and glass and glazing for exterior use in both vertical and sloped applications in buildings and structures.

- Altering or affecting the mechanical, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, ventilation, electrical, vertical transportation, fire sprinkler, or fire alarm systems.
- Changes beyond the exit access component of a means of egress system.
- Construction that materially affects life safety systems pertaining to fire safety or the fire protection of structural elements, or alterations to smoke evacuation and compartmentalization systems or to fire-rated vertical shafts in multistory structures.
- Changes of use to an occupancy of greater hazard as determined by the International Building Code.
- Changes to the construction classification of the building or structure according to the International Building Code.

REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNER AUTHORITY TO SEAL AND STAMP

The act requires a registered interior designer who is responsible for preparing the interior technical submission for delivery to any person or for a public record to date, sign, and impress his or her seal or stamp upon the technical submission and any other related documents prepared by the registered interior designer. A registered interior designer is prohibited from impressing his or her seal or stamp on a document that he or she did not prepare, or knowingly permitting his or her seal or stamp to be used by any other person. The act also prohibits a registered interior designer from impressing his or her seal or stamp upon a document unless the seal or stamp satisfies the rules promulgated by the interior designer section.

If a city, village, town, or county (local unit of government) requires a seal or stamp on interior technical submissions that are submitted for an interior alteration or interior construction project, the local unit of government must accept interior technical submissions impressed with the seal or stamp of a Wisconsin registered interior designer that comply with the law.

INTERIOR DESIGN FIRM, PARTNERSHIP, OR CORPORATION

With certain limited exceptions, **the act** creates a new requirement that an interior design firm, partnership, or corporation receive a certificate of authorization. Specifically, the act requires that an interior design firm, partnership, or corporation desiring a certificate of authorization must submit an application to DSPS listing the names and addresses of all officers and directors and all individuals in its employment registered to practice interior design in the state who will be in responsible charge of interior design being practiced through the firm, partnership, or corporation and other relevant information required by the registered interior designer section. The interior designer section must grant a certificate of authorization upon payment of the initial credential fee.

The renewal date for an interior design firm, partnership, or corporation certificate of authorization is February 1 of each even-numbered year.

The act also prohibits a Wisconsin registered interior designer from practicing or offering to practice interior design as a principal, officer, employee, or agent of a firm, partnership, or corporation unless both of the following are satisfied:

- All personnel who practice or offer to practice in its behalf as Wisconsin registered interior designers are registered, as required under the act.
- The firm, partnership, or corporation has been issued a certificate of authorization.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Prior law required an interior designer, when renewing his or her certificate of registration, to submit proof of completion of continuing education requirements that were established by DSPS by rule. DSPS promulgated administrative rules that required a registered interior designer to attend and successfully complete at least nine hours of an approved continuing education program before each two-year registration renewal date.

The act requires the new registered interior designer section to promulgate rules to require a registered interior designer to complete at least 15 hours of continuing education before each two-year renewal date, with at least 10 of the 15 hours in subjects related to the practice of interior design which safeguard the public's health, safety, and welfare.

Effective date: March 20, 2022, except that the following take effect on October 1, 2022: (1) the requirement that the interior designer section promulgate rules establishing specifications related to registered interior designer seals and stamps; and (2) the requirements related to a registered interior designer dating, signing, and impressing his or her seal or stamp upon an interior technical submission and any other related documents prepared by the registered interior designer.

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