

Facility Managers and Property Managers Sing ‘Kumbaya’

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The Building Owners and Managers Association standard for measuring office space has been used for leasing and management of commercial property since 1914. So why did the International Facility Managers Association (IFMA) introduce in 1996 their own very different “Standard Classification for Building Floor Measurement for Facility Management”, and what impact has that had on the BOMA standard? The answer to those questions is instructive about the differences between property and facility management and may also help to understand some of the changes that may be made to future editions of the BOMA and IFMA measurement standards.

Property management and facility management seem similar on the surface since they both relate to the operation of buildings and utilize similar tools such as operating cost benchmarking reports produced by both BOMA and IFMA. However, they differ in fundamental ways that lead to differences in how space is viewed. Property management views its primary goal as preserving the value of a building as an asset, whereas facility management sees its goal as ensuring the success of the enterprise occupying the building. Accordingly, the BOMA standard is geared toward allocation of costs among tenants and doesn’t address space utilization within tenant suites, which is a primary focus of the IFMA standard. When IFMA released the first version of its measurement standard it used many terms (like “rentable area”) that were the same as those in the BOMA Standard but defined them in different ways. That standard also used different boundary lines that, when coupled with the terminology differences, made it impossible for to “translate” between the BOMA and IFMA methods of measuring space. This made communication and work in general difficult for facility managers and many others in the real estate industry.

In 2004, the two organizations realized that they had to “play together” in the real estate sand box and formed a joint IFMA/BOMA Working Group to reconcile their two measurement standards. After three years of work, the result of their efforts is now available at each organizations web store as “A Unified Approach for Measuring Office Space For Use in Facility and Property Management”. While not intended to be used as a measurement standard, it will serve as a foundation for new versions of both the BOMA and IFMA standards, and is a good manual of measurement best practices for anyone, including design professionals, who are involved in the design and operation of commercial properties.

The “Unified Approach” will also serve the goals of OSCAR – the Open Systems Consortium for Real Estate – which seeks to facilitate the transfer of data about buildings among all who are involved in the industry.

Some of the features of the Unified Approach include a “Taxonomy of Space” that includes many terms that are new or redefined from the current BOMA and IFMA standards, a recommended sequence of measurement that accommodates the needs of both property and facility managers from a common set of CAD polylines, a wall ownership matrix that provides clear direction on location of boundary lines between spaces and a question-and-answer section to further clarify the intent of the authors.

A new version of the IFMA standard has already been drafted and has passed through committee at the American Society for Testing and Materials, the publisher that IFMA has chosen. IFMA plans to release the new standard in late July.

BOMA is working on complementary revisions to its measurement standard under the direction of its publisher, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) with the objective of releasing a new measurement standard in 2009. In addition to accommodating the Unified Approach, the new BOMA standard will be updated to reflect current practices for leasing commercial properties.

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