

HOW TO DETERMINE BUILDING OCCUPANCY

UNDERSTANDING USE & OCCUPANCY SERIES BY MEYERFIRE UNIVERSITY | OCTOBER 2022

SUMMARY

The International Building Code (IBC) requires that **all buildings be classified into one or more occupancy groups**. Chapter 3 of the IBC identifies 10 different occupancies: Assembly, Business, Educational, Factory and Industrial, High-Hazard, Institutional, Mercantile, Residential, Storage, and Utility and Miscellaneous. Some categories have sub-groups.

- Occupancy classification is one of the **most important factors** in achieving code compliance. It affects allowable height, area, construction type, requirements for fire-resistance-rated construction, fire protection and egress requirements.
- Occupancy classification is based on the intended purpose of a building (or portion of a building). Buildings can be **used** in an infinite amount of ways. Buildings can only have an **occupancy** in one of ten classifications found in the IBC.
- To determine an occupancy classification:
 1. Determine the intended purpose of a building or space.
 2. Select the occupancy category in IBC Chapter 3 that most closely resembles the space based on fire safety and relative hazard.
- Several provisions in IBC Chapter 3 are often overlooked.
 - Small Assembly Occupancies may not actually be considered Assembly (low occupant loads or area). See IBC 303.1.1 and 303.1.2.
 - Accessory storage areas are classified as a part of the main occupancy, not storage. See IBC 311.1 for details and limitations.



Assembly
(Theater)



Business
(Office Building)



Educational
(Classroom)



Factory & Industrial
(Processing Area)



High Hazard
(Flammable Liquid Storage)



Institutional
(Prison)



Mercantile
(Grocery Store)



Residential
(Duplex Home)



Storage
(Warehouse)



Utility & Miscellaneous
(Pavilion)

CODE/STANDARD REFERENCES



IBC – 2021: Chapter 3 - Occupancy Classification and Use

IBC – 2021: Section 303.1 & 303.2 – Small Assembly spaces *not* considered Assembly Occupancy

IBC – 2021: Section 311.1 – Accessory storage areas categorized under main occupancy

VIDEO LINK

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