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A PAPER FOR BUILDING OWNERS AND CONTRACTORS

The Existing Building Code and the Level of Alteration

How the 2024 International Existing Building Code classifies work on a building that already stands, and what each classification requires.

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Written for owners and contractors planning work on an existing building.

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Preamble

The International Existing Building Code is the most misunderstood book in the ICC code series. Many people who own, sell and work on buildings do not know it exists.

What they know is a phrase: "Oh, but that's grandfathered." Maybe so. Probably not. The word appears nowhere in the code. The code lets the legal occupancy of an existing building continue without change (Section 101.4.2). It says something different once work is proposed. Read on.

Decide the level of alteration on paper, before the scope is fixed and before the job is priced. The level sets how much of an existing building must be brought toward current code.

01 The position

A building that already stands is not judged as a new one. The International Existing Building Code classifies the proposed work, and the classification sets how far the requirements reach beyond the work itself.

I classify the work before the scope is fixed. Two things set the classification, and the owner controls both: the kind of work, and the floor area that is reconfigured. One wall, moved or left in place at the planning stage, separates a project that answers only for its own rooms from one that carries fire protection, exit and structural work into the rest of the building.

I apply the alteration levels as written. The triggers are not negotiated away to lower the cost of a project. The owner controls them by planning the scope around them.

Section 101.3 states the purpose of the code: flexibility, through alternative approaches, to reach a reasonable level of safety when an existing building is repaired, altered, added to, changed in occupancy or relocated. The preface gives the reason. Many sound buildings do not meet the code for new construction, and full compliance can cost more than the building or the project is worth. The code exists so those buildings stay in use.

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02 What the code is and where it applies

The International Existing Building Code (IEBC) is a model code published by the International Code Council. It has force only where a jurisdiction adopts it, and each jurisdiction adopts a particular edition with its own amendments. The City of Bisbee lists the 2024 IEBC, with city amendments, among the 2024 codes effective August 7, 2026. This paper follows the 2024 edition as Bisbee adopted it. Other jurisdictions adopt other editions, and section numbers change between editions. In this paper the building code is the International Building Code, the residential code is the International Residential Code, and the code official is the officer who enforces them.

The code governs five kinds of work on a building that already exists: repair, alteration, change of occupancy, addition and relocation (Section 101.2). Detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses of not more than three stories are permitted to follow either this code or the International Residential Code (Section 101.2, exception). For a house, the owner makes that choice with the building department before design starts.

Chapters	Subject
1, 2	Administration and definitions
3	Provisions that apply under every compliance method
4	Repairs
5	Prescriptive compliance method
6 to 12	Work area compliance method: classification of work, Alterations Level 1, 2 and 3, change of occupancy, additions, historic buildings
13	Performance compliance method
14	Relocated buildings
15	Construction safeguards
16	Referenced standards

03 Three ways to comply

Repairs go to Chapter 4 and relocated buildings to Chapter 14. For an alteration, an addition or a change of occupancy, the applicant selects one of three compliance methods (Section 301.3). The methods are not combined on one project.

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Method	Chapters	How it works
Prescriptive	5	New work meets the building code for new construction, and the building cannot end up less compliant than it was before the work (Sections 502.1, 503.1). A change of occupancy requires the building to meet the building code for the new use (Section 506.1).
Work area	6 to 12	The work is classified by kind and by extent, and the requirements grow with the classification. The Levels of Alteration belong to this method.
Performance	13	The building is scored on 21 safety parameters in three categories: fire safety, means of egress and general safety (Section 1305.1). The scores must reach the mandatory safety scores for the occupancy (Section 1306.2).

Section 301.3 carries one exception. With the code official's approval, an alteration that complies with the laws in effect when the building was built is accepted. The exception has limits: new structural members meet the current building code, and it does not reach accessibility under Section 306, substantial improvement in a flood hazard area, or the structural provisions of Section 304, Chapter 5 and Sections 706, 805 and 906.

The rest of this paper stays with the work area method, because its requirements follow the size of the project.

04 What kind of work is it?

Chapter 6 requires the work on an existing building to be classified (Section 601.1). The definitions in Chapter 2 make the first sort.

Classification	What it means	Where the rules are
Repair	Reconstruction, replacement or renewal of part of a building to maintain it or to correct damage	Chapter 4
Alteration	Construction or renovation that is neither a repair nor an addition; divided into Level 1, 2 or 3	Chapters 7, 8, 9
Change of occupancy	A change in occupancy classification, in purpose or level of activity, or in use, where the current building code asks more of the new use than the building now provides	Chapter 10
Addition	An increase in floor area, number of stories or height	Chapter 11
Historic building	A building listed in or eligible for the National Register, designated historic under state or local law, or certified as contributing to a designated historic district	Chapter 12

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One project often holds more than one classification. A shop converted to a restaurant with a new kitchen wing is a change of occupancy, an alteration and an addition at once, and each part answers to its own chapter.

Repair is the lightest category. A repair cannot leave the building less compliant than it was, and work on undamaged parts that the repair makes necessary is treated as part of the repair, not as an alteration (Section 401.2). Structural damage that is less than substantial structural damage is permitted to be restored to its pre-damage condition (Section 405.2.1).

The three Levels of Alteration

Level	Scope under Chapter 6	Technical chapters
1	Removing and replacing, or covering, existing materials, elements, equipment or fixtures with new ones that serve the same purpose (Section 602.1)	7
2	Adding or eliminating a door or window, reconfiguring or extending a system, or installing additional equipment, where the work area is 50 percent of the building area or less (Section 603.1)	7 and 8
3	Any alteration in which the work area is more than 50 percent of the building area (Section 604.1)	7, 8 and 9

The levels stack. A Level 2 alteration meets the Level 1 chapter as well as its own (Sections 603.2, 801.2), and a Level 3 alteration meets all three (Sections 604.2, 901.2). A work area of exactly 50 percent is Level 2. Section 603.1 excludes one item by exception: moving or adding nonfixed, movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high is not a Level 2 alteration.

05 The work area

The percentage that separates Level 2 from Level 3 is measured from the work area. The term is defined, and it is narrower than the area where work takes place. Chapter 2 defines the work area as the reconfigured spaces shown on the construction documents. The definition excludes two things: parts of the building where only incidental work is done because the intended work requires it, and parts where the owner did not intend to work but the code requires something.

The definition sorts four common cases:

- A room whose walls, doors or layout change is reconfigured. It is in the work area.
- A room that receives new finishes, fixtures or equipment in the same positions is not reconfigured. That work is Level 1 in kind.
- A corridor ceiling opened to run a new pipe or wire to the altered rooms is incidental work.

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- A smoke alarm added elsewhere in the building because the code calls for it does not enlarge the work area.

The code official makes the determination. Section 601.2 requires the work area to be identified on the construction documents. The plan reviewer classifies the project from the boundary drawn on the plans, so the level of alteration is decided in the drawings.

Fifty percent is measured twice

- Against the building: a work area over 50 percent of the building area makes the project Level 3 (Section 604.1). The user note to Chapter 9 describes the measure as the aggregate area of the building. The note reads 50 percent or more; Section 604.1, which governs, reads exceeds 50 percent.
- Against one floor: within a Level 2 project, a work area over 50 percent of a single floor extends twelve Chapter 8 requirements beyond the work area (section 07 of this paper).

For a building with more than one story, a basement or a mezzanine, ask the code official how the building area is counted, and get the answer before the design is fixed.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A two-story building has 1,800 square feet on each floor, 3,600 in all. The owner plans to reconfigure 1,000 square feet of the ground floor, and both floors count toward the building area.
>
> Against the building: 1,000 / 3,600 = 28 percent. The project is Level 2.
>
> Against the ground floor: 1,000 / 1,800 = 56 percent. The whole-floor requirements of Chapter 8 apply to the ground floor.
>
> Reduce the reconfigured area to 900 square feet and the floor figure is 50 percent, which does not exceed the threshold.

06 Level 1: replace and cover

Level 1 is like-for-like work: new roofing, siding, flooring, cabinets, fixtures, equipment, or windows in existing openings, each replacing what was there and serving the same purpose (Section 602.1). No space is reconfigured. Chapter 7 asks for the following.

- The building cannot be made less safe than it was (Section 701.2).
- Replacement windows in dwellings carry window fall prevention and emergency escape provisions (Sections 702.4, 702.5).
- New interior wall and ceiling finishes meet the finish requirements of the building code (Section 702.1), and new work follows current material and installation standards (Section 702.7).
- The existing level of fire protection, and of protection for the means of egress, is maintained (Sections 703.1, 704.1).

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- Reroofing follows the roofing chapter of the building code, with stated allowances for existing low-slope roofs that drain (Section 705).
- Structure: where new roofing or replaced equipment raises the design dead, live or snow load on an existing structural member by more than 5 percent, the member is altered or replaced to carry the loads required for new construction (Section 706.2). Two exceptions: Group R buildings of not more than five dwelling or sleeping units that comply with conventional light-frame methods or the residential code, and a second layer of roof covering weighing 3 pounds per square foot or less over a single existing layer.
- Energy: the altered elements meet the energy code. The building as a whole is not required to (Section 708.1).

Two reroofing triggers in Section 706.3 depend on location. Parapets of unreinforced masonry are evaluated or braced where more than 25 percent of the roof is reroofed on a building in Seismic Design Category D, E or F. Roof diaphragms are evaluated where roofing is removed from more than 50 percent of the diaphragm and the basic wind speed is over 130 mph. Bisbee's design criteria are Seismic Design Category B and a wind speed of 90 mph. Both triggers are outside those criteria.

Sections 307 and 308, which add smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detection when a building is altered, both exempt Level 1 work.

07 Level 2: reconfigure

Level 2 begins when the plan changes: a door or window is added or removed, a system is reconfigured or extended, or equipment is added (Section 603.1). The user note to Chapter 8 describes it as space reconfiguration up to and including 50 percent of the area of the building.

Three kinds of Level 2 work are released from the work-area requirements when they are the only work done: mechanical, electrical and fire protection systems and hazardous material abatement; windows, hardware, operating controls, electrical outlets and signs; and alterations made mainly to increase accessibility (Section 801.3). An electrical service upgrade or added mechanical equipment, done alone, is Level 2 by definition and carries none of the work-area requirements below.

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Inside the work area, Chapter 8 asks for the following.

Subject	Requirement in the work area	Section
Vertical openings	Existing interior openings that connect two or more floors are enclosed with 1-hour assemblies, with listed exceptions	802.2.1
Interior finish	Wall and ceiling finishes in exits and corridors meet the building code	802.4
Guards	A floor edge more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below receives a guard where none exists or where the existing guard is in danger of collapse	802.5.1
Sprinklers	Listed occupancy groups only. A work area with exits or corridors shared by more than one tenant, or serving an occupant load over 30, is sprinklered where the building code requires sprinklers in new construction and the work area exceeds 50 percent of the floor area. Where the existing water supply at that floor cannot serve a system without a new fire pump, automatic smoke detection is provided in its place.	803.2.2
Fire alarm	A fire alarm system by occupancy group	803.4.1
Means of egress	Applies to work areas that include exits or corridors shared by more than one tenant. Rooms with an occupant load over 50, or with more than 75 feet of travel to an exit, have two egress doorways. Dead-end corridors are limited to 35 feet, with listed exceptions. A means of egress that complies with the code under which the building was built is accepted where the code official finds no distinct hazard to life.	804.1, 804.2, 804.6.1.1, 804.8
Structure	A member whose design gravity load rises by more than 5 percent, or whose capacity is reduced, meets the loads for new construction. Where the alteration increases lateral loads, creates a structural irregularity or reduces lateral capacity, the lateral system is evaluated; an element whose demand-capacity ratio rises by not more than 10 percent is permitted to remain as it is. Group R buildings of not more than five units that comply with conventional light-frame methods or the residential code are excepted from the gravity check.	805.2, 805.3
Electrical	New wiring and equipment in the work area meet the electrical code (NFPA 70). In dwelling units, minimum receptacle and lighting outlets apply within the work area.	806.1, 806.4
Mechanical	Reconfigured spaces intended for occupancy have natural or mechanical ventilation under the mechanical code	807.1
Energy	The altered elements meet the energy code	809.1

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The whole-floor supplements

Where the work area on a floor exceeds 50 percent of that floor, twelve requirements leave the work area. Nine of them except tenant spaces that lie entirely outside the work area.

Requirement extended beyond the work area	Section	Outside tenant spaces
Vertical openings other than stairways, enclosed throughout the floor	802.2.2	Excepted
Stairways serving the work area, enclosed smoketight on the highest work area floor and all floors below	802.2.3	Not excepted
Interior finish in exits and corridors serving the work area, throughout the floor	802.4.1	Excepted
High-rise sprinkler requirement, entire floor	803.2.1.1	Excepted where occupied
Fire alarm, throughout the floor	803.4.2	Alarm devices excepted
Door swing, throughout the floor	804.6.2.1	Excepted
Door closing, throughout the exit stairway down to the level of exit discharge	804.6.3.1	Not excepted
Panic hardware, throughout the floor	804.6.4.1	Excepted
Other corridor openings, all on the floor	804.7.3.1	Excepted
Corridor doors, transoms and openings, throughout the floor	804.7.4	Not excepted
Egress lighting, throughout the floor	804.9.2	Excepted
Exit signs, throughout the floor	804.10.2	Excepted

Section 801.1 carries an exception that small projects use. Where the only reconfiguration is the result of meeting the accessibility requirements of Section 306.7.1, the project is permitted to comply with Chapter 7 (Section 801.1, exception).

08 Level 3: more than half the building

Level 3 is set by extent alone. Once the work area passes 50 percent of the building area, Chapter 9 applies together with Chapters 7 and 8 (Sections 604.1, 901.2). One exception: where the reconfiguration that affects exits or shared egress access results only from meeting the accessibility requirements of Section 306.7.1, Chapter 9 does not apply (Section 901.2, exception).

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Chapter 9 adds the following to Chapter 8.

Subject	What Level 3 adds	Section
Scope of the Level 2 rules	Sections 802 through 805 apply in every work area, whether or not it includes exits or corridors shared by more than one tenant, and regardless of occupant load. At Level 2 the means of egress section reaches only work areas with shared exits or corridors.	901.2, 804.1
Stairways	Existing stairways that are part of the means of egress are enclosed from the highest work area floor down to and including the level of exit discharge.	903.1
Dwelling unit separation	Where the work area is in an attached dwelling unit in Group R-3 or in a townhouse, a wall between dwelling units that is not continuous from the foundation to the underside of the roof sheathing is built out as a continuous fire separation, worked from the side that is in the work area.	903.2.1
Sprinklers	In the listed occupancy groups, work areas are sprinklered where the building code requires it for new construction and the site has sufficient municipal water supply for a system. Where the supply is not sufficient, automatic smoke detection is required in its place. Group R-3 is not among the listed groups.	904.1.4
Fire alarm	Fire alarm and detection are provided as the building code requires for new construction.	904.2
Exit lighting and signs	The exit enclosure is lit, and exit signs are provided, from the highest work area floor to the floor of exit discharge.	905.2, 905.3
Structure	Where the work is also a substantial structural alteration, the lateral system of the building is shown to meet the wind provisions of the building code and the reduced seismic criteria of Section 304.3.2. Excepted: Group R buildings of not more than five dwelling or sleeping units altered under conventional light-frame methods or the residential code, and the lateral system above the lowest story where the alteration involves only that story.	906.2
Masonry and concrete	Wall anchorage for concrete and reinforced masonry walls with flexible roof diaphragms in Seismic Design Category D, E or F. Wall anchorage, parapet bracing and partition anchorage for unreinforced masonry in Category C, D, E or F.	906.4 to 906.7
Energy	The altered elements meet the energy code.	907.1

Chapter 2 defines a substantial structural alteration as one in which the gravity load-carrying elements altered within a five-year period support more than 30 percent of the total floor and roof area of the building.

Level 3 costs the most in four cases: a building of more than one story (Sections 903.1, 905.2, 905.3), a building with more than one tenant (Section 901.2), unreinforced masonry in Seismic Design Category C or higher (Sections 906.5 to 906.7), and an occupancy group that the building code sprinklers when new (Section 904.1.4). Bisbee is Seismic Design Category B. Sections 906.4 through 906.7 do not apply there.

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The three levels side by side

Subject	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Trigger	Like-for-like replacement or covering	Reconfiguration; work area 50 percent of the building or less	Work area over 50 percent of the building
Chapters	7	7 and 8	7, 8 and 9
Fire protection	Existing level maintained	Sprinklers and alarm in the work area where triggered; whole floor where the work area exceeds 50 percent of the floor	Adds the municipal water supply test, with smoke detection where supply is insufficient; adds dwelling unit separation
Means of egress	Existing level maintained	Work areas with exits or corridors shared by more than one tenant	Every work area; stairway enclosure, exit lighting and exit signs down to exit discharge
Structure	5 percent gravity check for roofing and equipment	5 percent gravity check; 10 percent lateral allowance	Adds lateral evaluation for a substantial structural alteration, and masonry provisions by seismic category
Energy	Altered elements only	Altered elements only	Altered elements only

09 Requirements that apply at every level

Chapter 3 applies under all three compliance methods and at every level (Section 301.1). Five parts of it follow.

Accessibility (Section 306)

An alteration cannot reduce accessibility below the requirements for new construction (Section 306.2.1). Altered elements meet the accessibility provisions of the building code and ICC A117.1 unless that is technically infeasible, in which case access is provided to the maximum extent feasible (Section 306.7). Where the altered area contains a primary function, the route to that area and the toilet rooms and drinking fountains that serve it are made accessible as well. The cost of that added work is capped at 20 percent of the cost of the alterations to the primary function area (Section 306.7.1, exception 1). The same section excludes work limited to windows, hardware, controls, outlets and signs, to mechanical, electrical and fire protection systems, and to hazardous material abatement. A primary function is a major activity for which the building is intended: the dining room of a restaurant, the offices of a business. Federal accessibility law is separate from the building code and is outside this paper.

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Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detection (Sections 307, 308)

When a Group R or I-1 building is altered beyond Level 1, added to, changed in occupancy or relocated, smoke alarms are provided as the fire code or the residential code requires (Section 307.1). Carbon monoxide detection is required on the same events in any existing building, as the fire code or the residential code requires, with exceptions for work on exterior surfaces and for plumbing or mechanical work other than fuel-burning appliances (Section 308.1).

Existing and new materials (Sections 302.3, 302.4)

Materials already in the building that met the requirements in effect when they were installed stay in use unless the code official finds them unsafe. New materials meet current requirements, and like materials are permitted for repairs and alterations where no unsafe condition is created.

Exterior wall coverings (Section 309.2)

Adding or replacing exterior wall covering on two or more contiguous stories and on more than 15 percent of the wall area of any side brings the new-construction requirements of the building code for that work.

The other codes (Section 302)

Electrical, mechanical, plumbing, fuel gas, fire and energy work is done under those codes. Where one of them conflicts with the IEBC, the IEBC governs (Section 302.2). The code official has authority to require that dangerous conditions be eliminated, whatever the scope of work (Section 302.1).

10 Change of occupancy, additions and historic buildings

Change of occupancy

A change of occupancy needs the code official's approval, and a certificate of occupancy is issued once the requirements are met (Sections 1001.2, 1001.3). Chapter 10 separates two cases.

The first is a change of use, which Chapter 2 defines as a change within the same group classification that changes how the code applies. The work is classified under Chapter 6 like any other alteration and also meets Sections 1002 through 1010 (Section 1001.2.1).

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The second is a change of occupancy classification. Sections 1002 through 1011 apply (Section 1001.2.2). Where only a portion of the building changes, Section 1011 applies to that portion (Section 1001.2.2.1). Section 1011 also applies to a change within a group, and to a change that crosses a fire protection threshold in Chapter 9 of the building code (Section 1011.1).

Subject	Requirement that follows the new occupancy	Section
Structure	Members that carry live load from the changed area meet the live loads of the building code for the new occupancy. Where the change places the building in a higher risk category, snow and wind loads are checked for that category. The seismic system is checked where the risk category rises, or where the change is from Group S or Group U to any other occupancy. Each section lists exceptions.	1006.1, 1006.2, 1006.3
Electrical	Unsafe conditions are corrected, and the number of electrical outlets meets the electrical code for the new occupancy.	1007.2, 1007.4
Mechanical	Where the new occupancy has different kitchen exhaust requirements or greater ventilation requirements, it meets the mechanical code.	1008.1
Plumbing	Where the new occupancy requires more or different fixtures or more water supply, it meets the intent of the plumbing code. A new occupancy that produces grease-laden waste has interceptors as the plumbing code requires.	1009.1, 1009.3
Light and ventilation	Light and ventilation meet the building code for the new occupancy.	1010.1
Sprinklers	Where Chapter 9 of the building code requires an automatic sprinkler system for the new occupancy, the system is installed in the area of the change and in areas of the building not separated from it. One- and two-family dwellings and townhouses built under the residential code are excepted.	1011.2.1
Fire alarm	Where the building code requires a fire alarm and detection system for the new occupancy, it is provided throughout the area of the change.	1011.2.2
Interior finish	Interior finish in the changed area meets the building code for the new occupancy.	1011.3
Hazard scales	The old and new occupancies are compared for means of egress, heights and areas, and exposure of exterior walls. A move to a higher hazard on a scale brings the building code requirement for that subject, with listed exceptions. A move to an equal or lower hazard accepts the existing height, area and exterior walls, and judges the existing means of egress under Section 905.	1011.5, 1011.6, 1011.7
Vertical shafts	Where the change is to a higher hazard on the means of egress scale, interior stairways and other vertical shafts are enclosed as the building code requires, with listed exceptions.	1011.8

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Sections 1011.2 through 1011.8 apply to a change of occupancy classification. Accessibility follows Section 306.7 (Section 306.5). These requirements follow the new occupancy. The size of the work area does not reduce them. Settle the occupancy question first.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A shop (Group M) becomes a restaurant (Group A-2).
>
> Means of egress: both groups sit in the same hazard category, so the existing exits are judged under Section 905 for the new occupancy, and new or reconfigured exits meet the building code (Section 1011.5.2).
>
> Heights and areas: Group A-2 ranks above Group M, so the height and area of the building meet Chapter 5 of the building code for the restaurant (Section 1011.6.1).
>
> Exterior walls: Group A ranks below Group M, so the existing exterior walls and openings are accepted (Section 1011.7.2).
>
> Building systems: kitchen exhaust, plumbing fixtures and a grease interceptor follow Sections 1008.1, 1009.1 and 1009.3. Sprinklers follow Section 1011.2.1.
>
> A restaurant with an occupant load under 50 is classified as Group B, not Group A-2 (International Building Code, Section 303.1.1), which changes each comparison.

Additions

An addition meets the codes for new construction. The existing building is not required to comply, except where the addition affects it (Section 1101.1). The addition cannot create or extend a nonconformity in the existing building in accessibility, structural strength, supports and attachments for nonstructural components, fire safety, means of egress, or the capacity of the mechanical, plumbing or electrical systems (Section 1101.2). The enlarged building stays within the height and area the building code allows for a new building, unless the required fire separation is provided for area (Section 1102). An existing member that takes more than 5 percent additional gravity load from the addition is brought to the loads for new construction, except in Group R buildings of not more than five units that comply with conventional light-frame methods or the residential code (Section 1103.1). An addition that is structurally independent leaves the existing lateral system as it is. One that is not independent requires the combined structure to meet the wind and seismic provisions, with listed exceptions (Section 1103.2).

Historic buildings

Chapter 12 applies to a building that meets the Chapter 2 definition (Section 607.1). The work is still classified under Chapter 6. Chapter 12 then relaxes specific requirements so that historic fabric stays in place. Examples from the 2024 text:

- Repairs to historic buildings need only comply with Chapter 12 (Section 401.1). Repairs with original or like materials and original methods of construction are permitted (Section 1202.1).

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- Where the code official requires it, a registered design professional investigates the building and files a written report that identifies unsafe conditions. A Level 1 alteration that does not make the building less compliant is exempt (Section 1201.2).
- Existing interior finishes are accepted where they are shown to be the historic finishes (Section 1203.5).
- In buildings of three stories or less, exit enclosures limit the spread of smoke with tight-fitting doors and solid elements, and no fire-resistance rating is required (Section 1203.6).
- Existing handrails and guards are permitted to remain where they are not structurally dangerous (Section 1203.9).
- A historic building that cannot be made to conform and that constitutes a distinct fire hazard is deemed to comply when it is provided with an approved automatic sprinkler system (Section 1203.12).
- In a change of occupancy, the allowable floor area is permitted to exceed the building code limit by 20 percent (Section 1204.2).

Section 306.7.18 carries alternative accessibility provisions where full compliance would threaten or destroy the historic significance of the structure. A building in Bisbee's historic district has a second review: the Design Review Board rules on exterior appearance, and the code official applies the code. They are separate approvals.

11 Planning a project around the classification

Five steps, in this order, keep the classification under the owner's control.

1. Establish what exists. The percentages are ratios of measured areas: the reconfigured area over the floor area, and over the building area. Measured floor plans of the existing building settle both denominators. I produce them from a registered laser scan.
2. Fix the existing and the proposed occupancy. If the use is changing, determine whether the occupancy classification changes with it. A change of classification adds the requirements of Section 1011 whatever the size of the work area.
3. Draw the work area boundary. Decide which rooms are reconfigured and which receive only new finishes and fixtures, and show the boundary on the plans (Section 601.2).
4. Run the numbers on both scales, the building and the floor. Before adding scope, read the requirements that sit immediately across each threshold.
5. Take the classification to the building department before the drawings are finished. Bring the plan, the area calculation and the compliance method (Section 301.3). The code official's determination governs.

For contractors, the same arithmetic protects the schedule. A wall the owner decides to move after the permit is issued adds its room to the work area. Recalculate the area and take the revision to the building department before the wall moves. The classification on the permit then matches the work in the field.

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Phasing changes the count. Structural alterations made within a five-year period count together toward the 30 percent threshold for a substantial structural alteration (Chapter 2). The definition of work area carries no time period. The code official decides how work areas under successive permits are counted.

A note on this paper

This paper is general information about the 2024 International Existing Building Code as published by the International Code Council. It paraphrases the code and does not reproduce it. It is not legal advice and is not a code determination for any property. Local amendments apply, and the code official's interpretation governs. Where the code calls for evaluation or design by a registered design professional, an engineer is engaged for that work. Hope CGI, LLC prepares construction documents and LiDAR surveys of existing conditions. AZ BTR Firm Registration 26939.

Sources

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