



## **Proposed Changes to Building Codes** Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

***Q. How is “new” construction defined as related to the requirement for providing fire sprinklers in 1- and 2-family dwelling structures?***

A: The proposed code language requires fire sprinklers to be installed in 1- and 2- family dwelling structures where any of the following occurs:

1. A house is constructed on a vacant property.
2. A house is constructed on an existing foundation that may remain on site due to the teardown or loss of an existing structure above the foundation level due to fire or natural disaster.
3. The demolition and reconstruction of more than 50 percent of an existing structure, above the level of the foundation. For example, the removal of the roof framing on a house and construction of an additional floor level *would not require* fire sprinklers. The removal of the roof structure and the second floor level of a two-story structure and the reconstruction of same in kind, or larger in square footage, *would require* fire sprinklers throughout the entire structure.

***Q. What is the definition of renovations?***

A. Any construction or alteration to an existing structure other than a repair or addition.

***Q. Would the construction of an addition to a 1- or 2-family dwelling structure require fire sprinklers?***

A. No. Regardless of the size of the addition, or if the addition adds to the lot area coverage of the property or increases the building height, fire sprinklers would not be required.

***Q. Would general repairs or an interior renovation project, such as a kitchen or bathroom remodel, attic remodel or basement built-out require fire sprinklers?***

A. No. Regardless of the extent of repairs or alterations within the existing structure, fire sprinklers would not be required.

***Q. Would renovations to the building exterior, such as siding or roofing replacement, require fire sprinklers?***

A. No.

***Q. What is the definition of usable space for calculating floor area?***

A. Calculation of floor area with respect to requirements for providing fire sprinklers is based on the fire area of the building or tenant space. Fire area is defined as the aggregate floor

area enclosed and bounded by fire walls, fire barriers, exterior walls and/or fire-resistance-rated horizontal assemblies of a building, including the space occupied by those walls, or in the case of demising walls, to the centerline of the demising walls. Areas of the building not provided with surrounding walls shall be included in the fire area if such areas are included within the horizontal projection of the roof or floor next above. In simpler language, for a single-story building that has only one tenant, the fire area is the same as the building's footprint area. If the building has multiple tenants separated by fire-rated partitions, the fire area would be calculated as the area between the centerline of demising walls or the outside of exterior walls or walls abutting common areas (typically how lease areas are calculated).

***Q. Would the renovation of one space within a larger building require fire sprinklers in another area of the building that is not being renovated?***

A. In a building with multiple tenants, with work being performed in only one tenant space, fire sprinklers would not be required in tenant areas not being renovated as long as the demising walls of the tenant space being renovated had a 2-hour fire-resistance rating. Building owners can get assistance in determining if walls are fire-resistance-rated from a design professional or the building department.

***Q. What are the different occupancy classifications?***

A. Please refer to the [Use and Occupancy Classification listing](#).

***Q. Would the change of occupancy of a space, from say an insurance company to an architectural firm, one professional office to another professional office, require fire sprinklers?***

A. First let's understand the terms "occupancy" and "use". As used in the codes, the term "occupancy" deals with a broad spectrum of types of entities that could occupy a space. The attached Use and Occupancy Classification chart lists each of the broad *occupancy* classifications, A-Assembly, B-Business, E-Educational, etc. along with examples of the *uses* that are grouped into each occupancy classification. Each occupancy classification has different code requirements for life-safety depending on the number of occupants or safety hazards associated with each occupancy classification. So to directly get to the question, a change in use that is similar in nature to the previous use (insurance company to architectural firm, will not trigger the need for fire sprinklers regardless of size of the tenant space as long as the space is not being renovated or altered.

***Q. Concern was raised over the cost of providing fire sprinklers. Are fire pumps, new electric service, and RPZ valves required as part of the installation?***

A. With the exception of high-rise structures, in existing buildings, where the code requires fire sprinklers to be installed based on occupancy classification or extent of renovations, it

only requires sprinklers to be installed when there is sufficient water pressure at the point of connection to the municipal water supply to service a fire sprinkler system on the building

level where work is being performed, without the installation of a new fire pump. Therefore, a dedicated electric service for a fire pump is not required but a water service upgrade might be.

***Q. Why reduce the fire sprinkler threshold from 12,000sf to 3,500sf?***

A. The fire sprinkler threshold is proposed to be reduced to provide consistency throughout all occupancy classifications and revert back to the square foot limits for new construction that were in place prior to the last code adoption in 2004 which are still less stringent than some of our surrounding communities.

***Q. Why are Certificates of Occupancy required for cases where there is only a change of use?***

A. Approximately 40 percent of businesses in Oak Park do not require a business license inspection to open for business. These are generally professional service firms. Although these entities may not have the existing space renovated, changes in furniture or equipment layout, which by themselves do not require permits, may affect the load capacity of electrical systems, the building structure, required toilet fixture counts, emergency lighting and exit sign layouts, energy conservation measures, etc. Previous Village building codes have required the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy for change of use situations as well as for renovations, additions, alterations and new construction. The Building Department is working to be more proactive with this requirement to ensure the life-safety of building occupants.

***Q. Is there a fee associated with the Certificate of Occupancy or inspection therefore?***

A. No.

***Q. How long will it take to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy after the inspection is performed?***

A. Pending the results of the inspection, the inspector will be able to issue the Certificate of Occupancy, or a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy, at the time of the inspection.

###

*For more information, call 708.358.5430 or e-mail [building@oak-park.us](mailto:building@oak-park.us)*

## Use and Occupancy Classification

### **A Assembly**

- A-1 Assembly uses, usually with fixed seating, intended for the production and viewing of the performing arts or motion pictures.
- A-2 Assembly uses intended for food and/or drink consumption.
- A-3 Assembly uses intended for worship, recreation or amusement and other assembly uses not classified elsewhere in Group A.
- A-4 Assembly uses intended for viewing of indoor sporting events and activities with spectator seating.
- A-5 Assembly uses intended for participation in or viewing outdoor activities.

### **B Business**

- B Occupancies of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for office, professional or service-type transactions, including storage of records and accounts.

### **E Educational**

- E Occupancies of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, by six or more persons at any one time for educational purposes through the 12th grade. Religious educational rooms and religious auditoriums, which are accessories to churches and have occupant loads less than 100, are classified as A-3 occupancies.

### **F Factory**

Occupancies to a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for assembling, disassembling, fabricating, finishing, manufacturing, packaging, repair or process operations that are not classified as a Group H hazardous or Group S storage occupancy.

- F-1 Moderate-Hazard Occupancies: Factory industrial uses which are not classified as Factory Industrial F-2 Low Hazard.
- F-2 Low-Hazard Occupancies: Factory industrial uses that involve the fabrication or manufacturing of noncombustible materials which during finishing, packing or processing do not involve a significant fire hazard.

### **H High-Hazard**

Occupancies which include, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, that involves the manufacturing, processing, generation or storage of materials that constitute a physical or health hazard in quantities exceeding code-established limits.

- H-1 Building and structures containing materials that pose a detonation hazard.
- H-2 Buildings and structures containing materials that pose a deflagration hazard or a hazard from accelerated burning.
- H-3 Buildings and structures containing materials that readily support combustion or that pose a physical hazard.
- H-4 Buildings and structures which contain materials that are health hazards.

### **I Institutional Group**

Institutional Group I occupancy includes, among other, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, in which people are cared for or live in a supervised environment, having physical limitations because of health or age are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment, or in which people are detained for penal or corrective purposes or in which the liberty of the occupants is restricted.

- I-1 Buildings or structures, or parts thereof housing more than 16 persons on a 24-hour basis, who because of age, mental disability or other reasons, live in a supervised residential environment that provides personal care services. The occupants are capable of responding to an emergency situation without physical assistance from staff.
- I-2 Buildings or structures used for medical, surgical, psychiatric, nursing or custodial care on a 24-hour basis or more than 5 persons who are not capable of self-preservation.
- I-3 Buildings and structures that are inhabited by more than 5 persons who are under restraint or security. An I-2 facility is occupied by persons who are generally incapable of self-preservation due to security measures not under the occupant's control.
- I-4 Day Care Facilities: Buildings and structures occupied by persons of any age who receive custodial care for less than 24 hours by individuals other than parents or guardians, relatives by blood, marriage or adoption, and in a place other than the home of the person cared for. A facility such as the above with five or fewer persons shall be classified as Group R-3.

### **M Mercantile**

- M Buildings and structures, or portions thereof, for the display and sale of merchandise, and involves stocks of goods, wares or merchandise incidental to such purchases and accessible to the public.

### **R Residential**

- R-1 occupancies containing sleeping units where the occupants are primarily transient in nature, including: boarding houses, hotels, motels.
- R-2 occupancies containing sleeping units or more than two dwelling units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature, including: apartment houses, boarding houses (nontransient), dormitories, hotels (nontransient) motels (nontransient).
- R-3 residential occupancies where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature and not classified as Group R-1, R-2, R-4 or I, including: buildings that do not contain more than two dwelling units, adult day care facilities (five or fewer persons, any age, less than 24 hours), child care facilities (5 or fewer persons, any age, less than 24 hours) and congregate living facilities (16 or fewer persons).
- R-4 occupancies with buildings arranged for occupancy as residential care/assisted living facilities (more than 5 but less than 16 occupants, excluding staff).

### **S Storage**

Use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for storage that is not classified as a hazardous occupancy

- S-1 Moderate-hazard storage
- S-2 Low-hazard storage: buildings used for the storage of noncombustible materials such as products on wood pallets or in paper cartons with or without single thickness divisions; or in paper wrapping. Such products are permitted to have a negligible amount of plastic trim such as knobs, handles or film wrapping.

### **U Utility and Miscellaneous**

- U Buildings and structures of an accessory character not classified in any specific occupancy.