



## **RB06-002**

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# **MAJOR AND SUBSIDIARY OCCUPANCIES AND THEIR FIRE SEPARATION**

**Reference: Subsection 3.1.3. and Div A, Article 1.4.1.2.**

**Subsection 3.1.3.**“Multiple Occupancy Requirements”

**Div A, Article 1.4.1.2.**“Terms and Abbreviations”

### **Introduction:**

This Regulation Bulletin establishes guidelines for differentiating between subsidiary and major occupancies for applying Subsection 3.1.3. regarding fire separation.

The Code does not provide guidelines as to when a subsidiary occupancy should be considered a major occupancy for the purpose of fire separation.

### **Definitions:**

"Major Occupancy means the principal occupancy for which a building or part thereof is used or intended to be used, and shall be deemed to include the subsidiary occupancies that are an integral part of the principal occupancy." (ABC 2006)

“Subsidiary, adjective. 1) serving to assist or supplement; auxiliary. 2) subordinate, secondary.”  
(Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2nd edition)

“Department Store, noun. A large shop stocking many varieties of goods in different departments.”  
(Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2nd edition)

An occupancy satisfying the definition of "subsidiary" above need not be fire separated from the major occupancy. However, life safety requirements of Section 3.3., “Safety Within Floor Areas”, still apply to the subsidiary occupancies regardless of the major occupancy of the building which contains them.

The classification as a subsidiary occupancy should be made only when it satisfies all the following rules of mutual and exclusive interdependence with the major occupancy, i.e.:

- (a) the subsidiary occupancy serves only that major occupancy and no other, and it would cease to exist in the absence of the major occupancy,
- (b) the major occupancy would cease to function effectively if the subsidiary occupancy is deleted or even physically removed to another location,

(c) the major and subsidiary occupancies are under the control of the same management and usually open and close for business at the same time, and

(d) there is free accessibility at all times between the subsidiary occupancy and its major occupancy.

### **Commentary / Relevant Facts / Decisions:**

Using the above guidelines, the three most common cases of subsidiary occupancy are analyzed below:

#### **Scenario #1:**

Retail areas & storage areas in shops, supermarkets & department stores.

At present, this Division does not require a fire separation between retail areas in shops, supermarkets and department stores and the storage areas attached to these occupancies provided the latter serves only the retail area and is an integral part of that operation. In these cases, the criteria for subsidiary occupancy is deemed satisfied.

#### **Scenario #2:**

Boardrooms, Auditoria, Lunchrooms and Cafeterias in Office Buildings.

(a) Boardrooms and Auditoria: No fire separation is required from the general office area for boardrooms and auditoria used only by office staff of a single tenant. Boardrooms and auditoria used by multiple tenants and/or accessible to the public from time to time shall comply with Subsection 3.1.3..

(b) Lunchrooms: No fire separation is required if the lunchroom is for the sole use of the office staff of a single tenant. Those to be used by staff of more than one tenant shall comply with Subsection 3.1.3..

A lunchroom for the above purpose differs from a cafeteria in that it has no paid staff for serving of food, but may contain some self-service equipment such as refrigerators, vending machines and microwave ovens.

(c) Cafeterias: Cafeterias do require a fire separation as

i) there is no control of the people who will use it and there is no way to prevent it being used by the public, and

ii) the office will not cease to function effectively without the cafeteria (unlike e.g., without a boardroom) and thus the cafeteria fails the criteria of mutual dependence with the office, and cannot be considered a subsidiary occupancy.

#### **Scenario #3:**

Restaurants, Post Offices, Travel Agencies and similar Subsidiary Occupancies in Department Stores.

As the definition of a department store implies, the functions of a department store go beyond that of a normal retail store (i.e., the sale of merchandise) and may include certain personal service (Group D) activities such as post offices, travel agencies, hair dressing salons, photo studios, etc. These departments are an integral part of the store, and satisfy subsidiary occupancy guidelines. The space occupied by these Group D areas pose a lesser hazard than if occupied by retail (Group E) occupancies.

Post offices, travel agencies, hair dressing salons, photo studios, accounting offices and other similar Group D occupancies in department stores do not require a fire separation from retail areas.

Most restaurants in department stores cannot be considered an essential part of the operation. Many department stores can, and do, function quite effectively without restaurants. Due to their high occupant load, cooking equipment, visual isolation and relatively low level of illumination within retail areas having a high fire load, restaurants pose a potential fire hazard.

If at least some of these sources of danger (e.g., visual isolation and low level of illumination) are removed from restaurants of limited size, they can be considered a lesser threat to life and property, although they still do not necessarily strictly comply with subsidiary occupancy guidelines. It has to be recognized that some restaurants/cafeteria especially in single storey department stores in shopping malls which fall into this category, due to their open layout and free visual accessibility, pose a lesser hazard.

Restaurants and cafeterias in department stores in general do require fire separation from other areas in department stores to comply with Subsection 3.1.3., except as given below:

Restaurants and cafeterias in department stores which conform to all the conditions listed below do not require fire separation from adjoining areas:

- (a) the occupant load of the restaurant or cafeteria does not exceed 100,
- (b) the restaurant or cafeteria does not occupy more than 20% of the floor area of the store on the storey it is located,
- (c) the level of illumination of the restaurant or cafeteria is not less than that of the adjoining area, and
- (d) there is complete visual access between the restaurant or cafeteria and the adjoining area.

The rationale here is similar to the fire separation of mezzanine areas in Sentence 3.2.1.1.(3). Having complete visual access and no physical barrier is considered less hazardous than creating visual isolation with a physical barrier which does not provide adequate fire separation.

For cases not included above, contact a Building Codes Officer for clarification.

Chief Building Inspector

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Unless stated otherwise, the Code references in this bulletin are to Division B of the Alberta Building Code 2014 (ABC 2014). Bulletins do not overrule the ABC 2014 nor constitute a relaxation of the Code. They serve to clarify the Code in areas where the latter is ambiguous or does not cover a specific topic. Bulletins are City of Calgary clarifications for staff use to enable consistency in the application of the Code. These bulletins should always be read in the context of the appropriate requirements of the Code.