



## Building Guide

# Change of Occupancy

### What you need to apply for a building permit:



Permit Application



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Changing the occupancy of a building can present many challenges.
- In a change of occupancy, almost nothing is grandfathered. For example, an old house that is to be used as an office building must comply with most of the life safety code requirements, such as exiting, for a new office building.
- Before you consider purchasing, renting or leasing a site for your business, please visit the Community Development Department to talk to our staff. They can help you find out if the proposed use is allowed at the chosen location and tell you about any additional building or zoning requirements.
- Zoning regulates land uses to specific districts. Zoning and other codes require that land uses meet specific requirements for a particular land use. It is through the issuance of a change of occupancy permit that compliance with these requirements is met.
- South Carolina law requires that you hire a state licensed contractor to perform the work.
- Permits are valid for work to begin within six months.
- Permits expire if no work is performed for longer than 180 days.

## What Is A Change Of Occupancy Permit?

Every building is given an occupancy classification when it is originally built. Each classification has different building code requirements, which relate to the type of hazard or uses in the building. A change of occupancy is when there is a change in the building's use that would change the way the building code classifies the building's use. Over time, the use of a building may change. For example, an office building may become a day care center or a store. Another less obvious example of a change of occupancy is when a restaurant that has seating for less than 50 wants to increase the number of seats.

A change of occupancy applies to the use of a building only and is not related to any process required by the zoning ordinance to change the use of a property. Building occupancy classifications address the impact of the building on the occupants of the building, while zoning use classifications focus on how a property can be developed and the impact on surrounding properties.

It is important to keep in mind that the legal use of the building may not be its most recent actual use. That means that a change of occupancy permit may be required even if you don't plan to make any changes to the building or how the building is currently being used.

Your permit allows the building department to inspect for potential hazards and unsafe construction. By ensuring your project meets the minimum building code standards of safety, the building department can reduce the risk of fire, structural collapse and other issues that might result in costly repairs, injuries and even death. Inspections act as a system of checks and balances that can result in a safer project.

### It's the Law

Permits are required by City Ordinance. Failing to obtain a change of occupancy permit prior to occupying a location can result in unforeseen expense or the necessity to relocate from the site all together. A business license or any other permit from a regulatory agency **does not exempt** you from the requirement for a change of occupancy permit. Work without a permit may be subject to removal or other costly remedies.

### Additional Information

- ◆ If your change of occupancy involves any remodeling, all new work must meet current accessibility (ADA) requirements. Accessibility improvements must be prioritized in the following order: parking (if there is on-site parking), accessible route to the entry, accessible entry, restroom improvements, and accessible hi-lo drinking fountain.
- ◆ Inspections are required for a change of occupancy permit even if no actual work is being done.
- ◆ Once the job has been inspected and approved, a new **Certificate of Occupancy** will be provided to you for your records.

# OCCUPANCY CLASSIFICATIONS SUMMARY



## Group A: Assembly

- A-1 Movie theaters  
Concert halls
- A-2 Restaurants  
Taverns
- A-3 Churches  
Lecture halls
- A-4 Indoor sports arenas  
with spectator seating
- A-5 Outdoor sports arenas  
with spectator seating



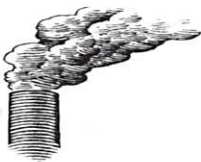
## Group B: Business

- Financial institution
- Professional services
- Animal hospitals



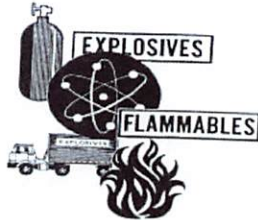
## Group E: Education

Places of learning with more than 5 students from 2.5 years through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but does not include classrooms located in churches.



## Group F: Factory

- F-1 Moderate hazard  
industrial/ production  
facilities
- F-2 Low-hazard industrial/  
production facilities



## Group H: High Hazard

The use of a building or structure for the processing or storing of materials that are considered hazardous in nature. Refer to the Building Official for buildings with this classification.



## Group I: Institutional

- I-1 Assisted living  
facilities  
(>16 occupants)  
Alcohol and drug  
centers
- I-2 Hospitals  
Nursing homes
- I-3 Prisons  
Detention centers
- I-4 Child daycare facilities  
Adult daycare facilities



## Group M: Mercantile

- Retail stores
- Markets



## Group R: Residential

- R-1 Hotels and Motels
- R-2 Apartments
- R-3 One and two family  
dwellings
- R-4 Assisted living  
facilities (5 to 16  
occupants)



## Group S: Storage

- S-1 Storage of moderate  
hazard materials
- S-2 Storage of non-  
combustible materials



## Group U: Miscellaneous

Structures not classified in any specific occupancy such as barns, carports, and fences.