

INTERNATIONAL EXISTING BUILDING CODE

Prescriptive Method Compliance

The prescriptive option is the traditional way of dealing with existing buildings. Any new work that is done must comply with the currently adopted codes, but the existing building is not required to be improved to a point of complying with the current code. However, if the building official determines that there are dangerous conditions in the building, the official can require repairs be made to bring the building into a safe condition. This would occur, for example, in a building that sustained damage due to some type of disaster like fire, flood or a wind event.

A repair occurs when an owner reconstructs or renews a portion of a building for the purpose of its maintenance. An example of a repair would be the reconstruction of a portion of a building after a high-wind storm. Repairs are permitted to be done with the same materials as the original construction. The owner is also allowed to restore the building to its pre-damaged condition if the building has not sustained substantial structural damage. To determine whether the building has sustained substantial structural damage, it must be evaluated by a registered design professional. If the building does sustain substantial structural damage, the repairs may need to be made in accordance with the current structural provisions of the IBC. [\[Ref. IEBC Section 404\]](#)

An alteration includes the reconfiguration of a building or a portion of a building. It can also include the installation of a new door or window. When an alteration is conducted under the prescriptive method, the new materials and methods of construction are required to comply with the current adopted codes. The rest of the building not being altered is not required to be brought up to current code. The only exceptions are for structural loads and smoke alarms in residential occupancies. The alteration cannot make the building worse than it was prior to the alteration work. It cannot create an unsafe condition. If an alteration increases the structural loads on a building, an evaluation of the structure must be done by a registered design professional. If an alteration is done to a residential occupancy, then smoke alarms are required to be installed in each unit in accordance with the *International Fire Code*. [\[Ref. IEBC Section 403\]](#)

Additions increase the area or height of a building. The addition must comply with the currently adopted codes. As with alterations, the addition cannot make the building worse than it was prior to the addition. For example, an addition cannot block an existing exit unless provisions are made to provide an equivalent to that exit within the addition or somewhere else in the building. The addition is not permitted to increase the area or height over the area and height restrictions in the IBC. The existing building is not required to be improved to comply with the current code unless the addition adversely affects the existing structure. As with alterations, when additions are made, smoke alarms are required to be installed in existing residential buildings.

A change of occupancy occurs when the use of a building or a portion of a building is changed to a different occupancy classification or use within an occupancy. The

prescriptive method requires the existing building to comply with the current adopted codes. The building official, however, has the authority to approve the building without making it comply with the current code if the new use is less hazardous, based on life and fire risk, than the existing use. An example would be changing a restaurant or night club to an office building. The office use is inherently less hazardous than the night club due to the reduction of occupant load and distractions. A new certificate of occupancy is created any time a change of occupancy occurs.