Chapter 3  Building Use

Hazardous occupancies

When a building contains reasonably large amounts of hazardous materials, it falls within the Group H occupancy classification. Hazardous materials are classified as either physical or health hazards. Physical hazard materials are materials that burn, have accelerated burning or produce an explosion. Health hazard materials can cause death or injury or can incapacitate a person after a single, brief exposure. These occupancies are obviously in the most hazardous group in the IBC. Some hazardous materials are permitted in other occupancy groups as long as they do not exceed a specific amount. However, when those amounts exceed a maximum allowable quantity of materials, the building receives the hazardous occupancy classification. There are five different levels of hazardous occupancies based on the level of hazard. This occupancy includes buildings where hazardous materials are stored, used or manufactured.

Institutional occupancies

Whenever a building houses people who cannot help themselves in case of an emergency, it is classified as a Group I occupancy. This classification has four subcategories of uses. This group includes assisted living facilities in which people are older or disabled and may need some direction to egress but are capable of getting out on their own. It also includes hospitals in which people may be unconscious or sick or injured enough that they cannot get out of a building on their own. Jails and prisons are also included in institutional occupancies (Figure 3-4). The last type of Group I occupancies are adult care facilities and child care facilities for children less than 2½ years of age. The classification is based on the amount of time that occupants spend in the building and the level of assistance they may need to respond to an emergency. The classification is also based on the number of people that are housed in the building. If the building houses less than seventeen care recipients, it would be considered a Residential occupancy. [Ref. 308]

Figure 3-4  A county jail falls within the Group I-3 occupancy classification.