

Code Briefs by Paul and Chuck

“As a service to our friends in the construction community.”

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CODE BRIEF

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Accessory Uses

Accessory uses are addressed in California Building Code (CBC) Section 508.3.1. These uses occur in most, if not all, projects and it is important to understand how the building code can be applied. There have been many instances where the architect and the plan checker have a different opinion when the provisions for an accessory use apply. This can of course create a problem for everyone involved.

An accessory occupancy (use) is one that is subsidiary to the main occupancy (use). That is, it is a necessary function for the main use even though the code may view it as a completely different occupancy category. The conditions for an accessory use(s) are that its aggregate area shall not occupy more than 10% of the story in which it is located and it (or they) cannot exceed the basic allowable area (A_t), without increases, as found in Table 503.

Typical assembly accessory uses include:

A conference room used by the office employees,

A lunchroom used by all of the employees.

A training room used for employees only.

In the above cases, the areas of these assembly rooms often exceed 750 square feet and that is when the potential conflict arises. We know that Exception No. 1 to Section 508.3.1, however, states that an assembly area having less than 750 square feet is not considered to be a separate occupancy. This does not mean that an assembly use cannot be more than 750 square feet and still be an

accessory use. If that were true, then 508.3.1 would not limit the area to A_t or 10% of the floor area. The accessory use criteria allows assembly areas, such as lunchrooms, to be considered to be a part of the main use, such as a Group B office, Group F industrial or Group S storage facility. The reason being that those employees who occupy these types of uses would be the only occupants who use the lunchroom. Therefore, they would be aware of the surroundings and not necessarily need additional fire-resistive protection.

The main advantages of these criteria are:

- The allowable area, story and height are based on the main use and the assembly use is not considered as creating a mixed use.
- Occupancy separations (fire barriers) between the accessory use(s) and the main use are not required. As an example, in the case of an office and conference room, the one-hour fire-resistance rating for the walls and the openings found in Table 508.3.3 no longer apply. (However, the SFM amendment does require a fire barrier for I-2.1 accessory uses.)
- The means of egress may pass through an accessory area using it as an intervening room.

It should be noted that with few exceptions any occupancy classification can be an accessory use and take advantage of the benefits of this section in the CBC.

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