

“OCCUPANT LOAD” VS “OCCUPANCY”?

INTRODUCTION TO OCCUPANT LOAD SERIES BY MEYERFIRE UNIVERSITY | FEBRUARY 2023

SUMMARY

An Occupant Load and Occupancy are two separate terms, which people sometimes confuse; they are different concepts, but they are closely related.

- **Occupancy** is a classification of a room, area, space or building. It's a representation of the nature of a building in terms of risk.
 - Risk in terms of the number of occupants, their ability to evacuate independently in an emergency, and familiarity with surroundings.
 - Occupancy affects many aspects of building design, like what construction type is required or how tall the building can be.
 - There is an unlimited amount of possible uses of a space, but only ten ways we can classify an occupancy within the IBC.
- **Occupant Load** (and **Occupant Load Factors**) are numbers that represent the concentration of people in the space. It's based on how each space is intended to be *used*. Is it used for storage, for business, for gathering, for classroom style teaching?
 - We assign a factor based on how the space is being used with respect to the density and number of people in the space. It's just a number. It doesn't consider the nature of the occupants or their relative risk.
 - An **Occupant Load** *can* affect a building's **Occupancy** type, but the **Occupancy** type **does not affect** a space's **Occupant Load**.



SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM 600 SQFT
/ (15 SQFT PER PERSON)
= 40 PEOPLE
BUSINESS OCCUPANCY



LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM 1,200 SQFT
/ (15 SQFT PER PERSON)
= 80 PEOPLE
ASSEMBLY OCCUPANCY

Example of Two Conference Rooms within an Office Building with the Same Occupant Load Factor, but Different Occupancy Types
(Occupancy type is just one of ten designations in the International Building Code, while Occupant Load Factors are based on the intended *use* of a space)

CODE/STANDARD REFERENCES



IBC – 2021: Table 1004.5 Occupant Load Factors

IBC – 2021: Section 303.1.2 and 1004.5 – Occupant Load Factor for Small Assembly Spaces

NFPA 101 – 2021: Table 7.3.1.2 Occupant Load Factors

VIDEO LINK

<http://www.meyerfire.com/university/difference-between-occupant-load-occupancy>

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