

Utility & Miscellaneous Occupancy - Group U

2025 California Building Code §312 - Accessory and miscellaneous structures

Purpose. Group U is used for accessory or miscellaneous buildings and structures that are not classified in another specific occupancy group. The classification reflects the limited or accessory nature of the use, not an exemption from code requirements.

1. Typical Group U Uses

- Agricultural buildings, barns, livestock shelters and stables.
- Private garages and carports.
- Residential accessory aircraft hangars.
- Sheds, tanks, towers and certain communication equipment structures.
- Retaining walls and fences above the applicable code height.
- Accessory grain silos and qualifying greenhouses.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §312.1

2. Special Group U Provisions

- Private garages and carports must comply with CBC §406.3.
- Residential aircraft hangars have additional requirements under CBC §412.4.
- Greenhouses not classified as another occupancy are Group U.
- Agricultural buildings can have additional provisions in CBC Appendix C where that appendix is applicable/adopted.
- A building called a “shed” or “barn” is not automatically Group U if its actual use is manufacturing, commercial storage, assembly, retail, hazardous materials or another classified occupancy.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§312.1.1-312.3

3. Common Classification Questions

- Private residential garage vs. public parking garage (public parking is generally Group S-2).
- Agricultural accessory structure vs. commercial warehouse or processing building.
- Greenhouse used only for growing/production vs. greenhouse open to the public for display/sales (which can be M) or exhibition (which can be A-3).
- Accessory storage building vs. a storage occupancy large enough or independent enough to be Group S.

4. Fire & Life-Safety Review Considerations

- Verify the actual use of each room, tenant space and outdoor/rooftop area; a building can contain more than one occupancy group.
- Determine occupant load and means-of-egress requirements under CBC Chapter 10.
- Evaluate automatic sprinkler and fire alarm requirements under CBC/CFC Chapter 9.
- Check allowable building height/area, construction type and occupancy separation requirements under CBC Chapters 5 through 7.
- Maintain required fire department access, water supply, addressing, key-box access and fire protection equipment access as applicable.
- Changes in use or occupancy can trigger a new code analysis even when little or no construction work is proposed.
- Even Group U structures can require fire department access, setbacks, water supply, electrical permits, hazardous-material controls and wildfire/vegetation compliance depending on the use and location.

Code reference: 2025 CBC Chapters 5-10; 2025 CFC Chapters 5, 9 and applicable occupancy/hazard chapters

Primary References

References: 2025 California Building Code §312 - Utility and Miscellaneous Group U; 2025 California Fire Code §203.11 - Utility and Miscellaneous Group U; 2025 CBC §406.3 and 412.4; 2024 International Building Code Chapter 3

Final requirements depend on the actual use, occupant load, building size and construction, mixed occupancies, hazardous materials and fire-protection systems. The fire/building code official makes the final occupancy-classification determination.