

Assembly Occupancy - Group A

2025 California Building Code §303 - Groups A-1 through A-5

Purpose. Group A covers places where people gather for civic, social, religious, recreational, entertainment, food/drink, spectator or similar assembly purposes. The subgroup depends primarily on how the assembly space is used.

1. When a Space Is Group A

Assembly classification is based on the purpose of the gathering, not simply the name of the business. Restaurants, theaters, churches, gyms with spectators, community halls and stadiums can all be Group A but fall into different subgroups.

Small assembly uses can sometimes be classified as Group B or as part of another occupancy. Under CBC §303, an assembly building or tenant space with an occupant load below 50 is generally Group B. Certain accessory assembly rooms with occupant load below 50, or less than 750 square feet, are not treated as separate Group A occupancies.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§303.1-303.1.4

2. Group A Subclassifications

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§303.2-303.6

Group	Primary use	Common examples
A-1	Performing arts / motion pictures, usually fixed seating	Theaters, concert halls, audience studios
A-2	Food and/or drink consumption	Restaurants, banquet halls, bars, nightclubs, casino gaming areas
A-3	Worship, recreation, amusement, general assembly	Churches, community halls, museums, libraries, bowling, arcades, gyms without spectator seating
A-4	Indoor sporting events with spectator seating	Arenas, skating rinks, spectator pools/tennis facilities
A-5	Outdoor participation or spectator activities	Stadiums, bleachers, grandstands, amusement park structures

3. Classification Boundaries

- Assembly rooms associated with a Group E school can be treated as part of the Group E occupancy rather than a separate Group A occupancy.
- Accessory religious educational rooms and religious auditoriums with occupant loads below 100 per room are not separate occupancies under the CBC provision.
- Special amusement areas have additional requirements under CBC §411.
- A change from retail, office or warehouse use to an event, restaurant, worship or entertainment use can change the occupancy classification even if the building footprint is unchanged.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§303.1.3-303.1.5

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.
- Assembly occupancies often require special attention to occupant load posting, exit capacity, panic/fire-exit hardware, crowd management, decorative materials, cooking/open flames and event layouts.

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

Primary References

References: 2025 California Building Code Chapter 3, §303 - Assembly Group A; 2025 California Fire Code §203.2 - Assembly Group A; 2024 International Building Code Chapter 3 (model-code basis for the 2025 CBC)

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.