

2018  
INTERNATIONAL  
BUILDING CODE®  
ILLUSTRATED  
HANDBOOK

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The International Code Council® (ICC®) is a member-focused association dedicated to helping the building safety community and construction industry provide safe, sustainable, and affordable construction through the development of codes and standards used in the design, build, and compliance process. Most U.S. communities and many global markets choose the International Codes®. ICC Evaluation Service (ICC-ES), a subsidiary of the International Code Council, has been the industry leader in performing technical evaluations for code compliance fostering safe and sustainable design and construction.

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# 2018 INTERNATIONAL BUILDING CODE® ILLUSTRATED HANDBOOK

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### **2018 International Building Code® Illustrated Handbook**

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 LCR 22 21 20 19 18

ISBN 978-1-260-13229-8

MHID 1-260-13229-3

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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# Contents

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Foreword .....	xv
Preface .....	xvii
Acknowledgments .....	xix

## Chapter 1 Scope and Administration ..... 1

□ Section 101	General .....	2
□ Section 102	Applicability .....	4
□ Section 103	Department of Building Safety .....	5
□ Section 104	Duties and Powers of Building Official .....	6
□ Section 105	Permits .....	9
□ Section 107	Submittal Documents .....	11
□ Section 108	Temporary Structures and Uses .....	12
□ Section 109	Fees .....	12
□ Section 110	Inspections .....	13
□ Section 111	Certificate of Occupancy .....	14
□ Section 112	Service Utilities .....	15
□ Section 113	Board of Appeals .....	16
□ Section 114	Violations .....	16
□ Section 115	Stop Work Order .....	16
□ Section 116	Unsafe Structures and Equipment .....	18
□ KEY POINTS .....		18

## Chapter 2 Definitions ..... 19

□ Section 201	General .....	20
□ Section 202	Definitions .....	20
□ KEY POINTS .....		47

## Chapter 3 Occupancy Classification and Use .... 49

□ Section 302	Classification .....	50
□ Section 303	Assembly Group A .....	52
□ Section 304	Business Group B .....	56
□ Section 305	Educational Group E .....	58

□ Section 306	Factory Group F .....	60
□ Section 307	High-Hazard Group H .....	60
□ Section 308	Institutional Group I .....	67
□ Section 309	Mercantile Group M .....	70
□ Section 310	Residential Group R .....	71
□ Section 311	Storage Group S .....	73
□ Section 312	Utility and Miscellaneous Group U .....	74
□ KEY POINTS .....		75

## Chapter 4 Special Detailed Requirements Based on Occupancy and Use ..... 77

□ Section 402	Covered Mall and Open Mall Buildings .....	78
□ Section 403	High-Rise Buildings .....	88
□ Section 404	Atriums .....	94
□ Section 405	Underground Buildings .....	97
□ Section 406	Motor-Vehicle-Related Occupancies .....	99
□ Section 407	Group I-2 .....	104
□ Section 408	Group I-3 .....	108
□ Section 409	Motion-Picture Projection Rooms .....	109
□ Section 410	Stages, Platforms, and Technical Production Areas .....	109
□ Section 411	Special Amusement Buildings .....	112
□ Section 412	Aircraft-Related Occupancies .....	112
□ Section 413	Combustible Storage .....	114
□ Section 414	Hazardous Materials .....	115
□ Section 415	Groups H-1, H-2, H-3, H-4, and H-5 .....	118
□ Section 416	Application of Flammable Finishes .....	122
□ Section 417	Drying Rooms .....	123
□ Section 418	Organic Coatings .....	123
□ Section 419	Live/Work Units .....	123
□ Section 420	Groups I-1, R-1, R-2, R-3, and R-4 .....	125

□ Section 422	Ambulatory Care Facilities . . .	126	□ Section 707	Fire Barriers . . . . .	239
□ Section 423	Storm Shelters . . . . .	128	□ Section 708	Fire Partitions . . . . .	241
□ Section 424	Children's Play Structures . . .	129	□ Section 709	Smoke Barriers . . . . .	244
□ Section 427	Medical Gas Systems . . . . .	129	□ Section 710	Smoke Partitions . . . . .	245
□ Section 428	Higher Education Laboratories . . . . .	129	□ Section 711	Floor and Roof Assemblies . .	245
□ KEY POINTS . . . . .		131	□ Section 712	Vertical Openings . . . . .	246
<b>Chapter 5</b>			□ Section 713	Shaft Enclosures . . . . .	249
<b>General Building Heights and Areas . . . . . 133</b>			□ Section 714	Penetrations . . . . .	252
□ Section 502	Building Address . . . . .	134	□ Section 715	Fire-Resistant Joint Systems . . . . .	262
□ Section 503	General Building Height and Area Limitations . . . . .	134	□ Section 716	Opening Protectives . . . . .	264
□ Section 504	Building Height and Number of Stories . . . . .	137	□ Section 717	Ducts and Air Transfer Openings . . . . .	269
□ Section 505	Mezzanines and Equipment Platforms . . . . .	138	□ Section 718	Concealed Spaces . . . . .	275
□ Section 506	Building Area . . . . .	142	□ Section 719	Fire-Resistance Requirements for Plaster . . .	281
□ Section 507	Unlimited-Area Buildings . . .	156	□ Section 720	Thermal- and Sound- Insulating Materials . . . . .	281
□ Section 508	Mixed Use and Occupancy . . . . .	165	□ Section 721	Prescriptive Fire Resistance . . . . .	282
□ Section 509	Incidental Uses . . . . .	177	□ Section 722	Calculated Fire Resistance . . . . .	286
□ Section 510	Special Provisions . . . . .	180	□ KEY POINTS . . . . .		287
□ KEY POINTS . . . . .		184	<b>Chapter 8</b>		
<b>Chapter 6</b>			<b>Interior Finishes . . . . . 289</b>		
<b>Types of Construction . . . . . 187</b>			□ Section 802	General . . . . .	290
□ Section 602	Construction Classification . .	188	□ Section 803	Wall and Ceiling Finishes . .	291
□ Section 603	Combustible Material in Type I and II Construction . . . . .	197	□ Section 804	Interior Floor Finish . . . . .	294
□ KEY POINTS . . . . .		199	□ Section 805	Combustible Materials in Types I and II Construction . . . . .	295
<b>Chapter 7</b>			□ KEY POINTS . . . . .		295
<b>Fire and Smoke Protection Features . . . . . 201</b>			<b>Chapter 9</b>		
□ Section 702	Multiple Use Fire Assemblies . . . . .	202	<b>Fire Protection and Life-Safety Systems . . . . . 297</b>		
□ Section 703	Fire-Resistance Ratings and Fire Tests . . . . .	202	□ Section 901	General . . . . .	298
□ Section 704	Fire-Resistance Rating of Structural Members . . . . .	208	□ Section 902	Fire Pump and Riser Room Size . . . . .	300
□ Section 705	Exterior Walls . . . . .	214	□ Section 903	Automatic Sprinkler Systems . . . . .	301
□ Section 706	Fire Walls . . . . .	228	□ Section 904	Alternative Automatic Fire- Extinguishing Systems . . . .	326
			□ Section 905	Standpipe Systems . . . . .	327

- Section 907 Fire Alarm and Detection Systems . . . . . 333
- Section 909 Smoke Control Systems . . . . . 343
- Section 910 Smoke and Heat Removal . . . . . 348
- Section 911 Fire Command Center . . . . . 350
- Section 912 Fire Department Connections . . . . . 351
- Section 913 Fire Pumps . . . . . 352
- Section 914 Emergency Responder Safety Features . . . . . 353
- Section 915 Carbon Monoxide Detection . . . . . 353
- Section 916 Gas Detection Systems . . . . . 353
- Section 917 Mass Notification Systems . . . . . 354
- KEY POINTS . . . . . 355

**Chapter 10  
Means of Egress . . . . . 357**

- Section 1001 Administration . . . . . 359
- Section 1002 Maintenance and Plans . . . . . 359
- Section 1003 General Means of Egress . . . . . 360
- Section 1004 Occupant Load . . . . . 365
- Section 1005 Means of Egress Sizing . . . . . 378
- Section 1006 Number of Exits and Exit Access Doorways . . . . . 386
- Section 1007 Exit and Exit Access Doorway Configuration . . . . . 394
- Section 1008 Means of Egress Illumination . . . . . 398
- Section 1009 Accessible Means of Egress . . . . . 400
- Section 1010 Doors, Gates, and Turnstiles . . . . . 406
- Section 1011 Stairways . . . . . 426
- Section 1012 Ramps . . . . . 437
- Section 1013 Exit Signs . . . . . 439
- Section 1014 Handrails . . . . . 442
- Section 1015 Guards . . . . . 449
- Section 1016 Exit Access . . . . . 454
- Section 1017 Exit Access Travel Distance . . . . . 456
- Section 1018 Aisles . . . . . 459
- Section 1019 Exit Access Stairways and Ramps . . . . . 460

- Section 1020 Corridors . . . . . 461
- Section 1021 Egress Balconies . . . . . 467
- Section 1022 Exits . . . . . 467
- Section 1023 Interior Exit Stairways and Ramps . . . . . 468
- Section 1024 Exit Passageways . . . . . 472
- Section 1025 Luminous Egress Path Markings . . . . . 474
- Section 1026 Horizontal Exits . . . . . 475
- Section 1027 Exterior Exit Stairways and Ramps . . . . . 479
- Section 1028 Exit Discharge . . . . . 482
- Section 1029 Assembly . . . . . 485
- Section 1030 Emergency Escape and Rescue . . . . . 499
- KEY POINTS . . . . . 502

**Chapter 11  
Accessibility . . . . . 507**

- Section 1101 General . . . . . 510
- Section 1102 Compliance . . . . . 511
- Section 1103 Scoping Requirements . . . . . 511
- Section 1104 Accessible Route . . . . . 513
- Section 1105 Accessible Entrances . . . . . 515
- Section 1106 Parking and Passenger Loading Facilities . . . . . 516
- Section 1107 Dwelling Units and Sleeping Units . . . . . 518
- Section 1108 Special Occupancies . . . . . 521
- Section 1109 Other Features and Facilities . . . . . 523
- Section 1110 Recreational Facilities . . . . . 526
- Section 1111 Signage . . . . . 526
- KEY POINTS . . . . . 527

**Chapter 12  
Interior Environment . . . . . 529**

- Section 1202 Ventilation . . . . . 530
- Section 1203 Temperature Control . . . . . 534
- Section 1204 Lighting . . . . . 534
- Section 1205 Yards or Courts . . . . . 535
- Section 1206 Sound Transmission . . . . . 536
- Section 1207 Interior Space Dimensions . . . . . 537



- Section 1208 Access to Unoccupied Spaces ..... 538
- Section 1209 Toilet and Bathroom Requirements ..... 538
- KEY POINTS ..... 539

## Chapter 13 Energy Efficiency.....541

## Chapter 14 Exterior Walls.....543

- Section 1402 Performance Requirements ..... 544
- Section 1403 Materials ..... 545
- Section 1404 Installation of Wall Coverings ..... 545
- Section 1405 Combustible Materials on the Exterior Side of Exterior Walls..... 547
- Section 1406 Metal Composite Materials ..... 547
- Section 1407 Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems ..... 548
- KEY POINTS ..... 548

## Chapter 15 Roof Assemblies and Rooftop Structures.....549

- Section 1504 Performance Requirements ..... 550
- Section 1505 Fire Classification..... 551
- Section 1506 Materials ..... 552
- Section 1510 Rooftop Structures..... 553
- KEY POINTS ..... 555

## Introduction to the Structural Provisions .....557

- Structural Design (Chapter 16):  
Structural Loads..... 558
- Load Combinations ..... 562

## Chapter 16 Structural Design .....563

- Introduction ..... 564

- Section 1601 General ..... 564
- Section 1602 Notations ..... 565
- Section 1603 Construction Documents .. 565
- Section 1604 General Design Requirements ..... 565
- Section 1605 Load Combinations ..... 579
- Section 1606 Dead Loads ..... 581
- Section 1607 Live Loads ..... 581
- Section 1608 Snow Loads..... 593
- Section 1609 Wind Loads ..... 598
- Section 1610 Soil Lateral Loads..... 603
- Section 1611 Rain Loads..... 604
- Section 1612 Flood Loads..... 605
- Section 1613 Earthquake Loads ..... 607
- Section 1614 Atmospheric Ice Loads .... 612
- Section 1615 Tsunami Loads..... 613
- Section 1616 Structural Integrity..... 613
- KEY POINTS ..... 613
- Example 16-1 Design Axial Force, Shear Force, and Bending Moment for Shear Wall Due to Lateral and Gravity Loads (Strength Design) ..... 615
- Example 16-2 Design Axial Force, Shear Force, and Bending Moment for Shear Wall Due to Lateral and Gravity Loads (Allowable Stress Design Using Basic Load Combinations) ..... 616
- Example 16-3 Design Axial Force, Shear Force, and Bending Moment for Shear Wall Due to Lateral and Gravity Loads (Allowable Stress Design Using Alternate Basic Load Combinations) ..... 617
- Example 16-4 Calculations of Live Load Reduction ..... 618

## Chapter 17 Special Inspections and Tests.....621

- Introduction ..... 622
- Section 1701 General ..... 622

□ Section 1702	New Materials. . . . .	624
□ Section 1703	Approvals. . . . .	625
□ Section 1704	Special Inspections and Tests, Contractor Responsibility, and Structural Observations . . .	631
□ Section 1705	Required Special Inspections and Tests. . . . .	637
□ Section 1706	Design Strengths of Materials . . . . .	651
□ Section 1707	Alternate Test Procedures . . . . .	651
□ Section 1708	In Situ Load Tests. . . . .	651
□ Section 1709	Preconstruction Load Tests. . . . .	652
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	659

## Chapter 18 Soils and Foundations . . . . . **661**

□ Introduction . . . . .	662
□ Section 1801	General . . . . . 662
□ Section 1802	Design Basis. . . . . 662
□ Section 1803	Geotechnical Investigations . . . . . 663
□ Section 1804	Excavation, Grading, and Fill. . . . . 667
□ Section 1805	Dampproofing and Waterproofing. . . . . 668
□ Section 1806	Presumptive Load-Bearing Values of Soils. . . . . 677
□ Section 1807	Foundation Walls, Retaining Walls, and Embedded Posts and Poles. . . . . 678
□ Section 1808	Foundations . . . . . 683
□ Section 1809	Shallow Foundations . . . . . 689
□ Section 1810	Deep Foundations . . . . . 695
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . . 721

## Chapter 19 Concrete . . . . . **725**

□ Introduction . . . . .	726
□ Section 1901	General . . . . . 726
□ Section 1902	Definitions. . . . . 727
□ Section 1903	Specifications for Tests and Materials . . . . . 727

□ Section 1904	Durability Requirements. . .	728
□ Section 1905	Modifications to ACI 318. . .	729
□ Section 1906	Structural Plain Concrete . .	731
□ Section 1907	Minimum Slab Provisions . .	731
□ Section 1908	Shotcrete . . . . .	732
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	733

## Chapter 20 Aluminum. . . . . **735**

□ Introduction . . . . .	736
□ Section 2002	Materials . . . . . 736
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . . 737

## Chapter 21 Masonry . . . . . **739**

□ Introduction . . . . .	740	
□ Section 2101	General . . . . . 740	
□ Section 2102	Notations. . . . . 742	
□ Section 2103	Masonry Construction Materials . . . . . 742	
□ Section 2104	Construction. . . . . 745	
□ Section 2105	Quality Assurance . . . . . 745	
□ Section 2106	Seismic Design. . . . . 746	
□ Section 2107	Allowable Stress Design . . .	750
□ Section 2108	Strength Design of Masonry . . . . . 752	
□ Section 2109	Empirical Design of Adobe Masonry . . . . . 753	
□ Section 2110	Glass Unit Masonry . . . . . 754	
□ Section 2111	Masonry Fireplaces. . . . . 755	
□ Section 2112	Masonry Heaters . . . . . 755	
□ Section 2113	Masonry Chimneys . . . . . 755	
□ Section 2114	Dry-Stack Masonry . . . . . 756	
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . . 756	

## Chapter 22 Steel . . . . . **759**

□ Introduction . . . . .	760
□ Section 2201	General . . . . . 760
□ Section 2202	Identification of Steel for Structural Purposes . . . . . 760
□ Section 2203	Protection of Steel for Structural Purposes . . . . . 760
□ Section 2204	Connections . . . . . 761

□ Section 2205	Structural Steel . . . . .	762
□ Section 2206	Composite Structural Steel and Concrete Structures . . . . .	764
□ Section 2207	Steel Joists . . . . .	764
□ Section 2208	Steel Cable Structures . . . . .	767
□ Section 2209	Steel Storage Racks . . . . .	767
□ Section 2210	Cold-Formed Steel . . . . .	768
□ Section 2211	Cold-Formed Steel Light-Frame Construction . . . . .	770
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	772

## Chapter 23 Wood . . . . . **775**

□ Introduction . . . . .	776
□ Section 2301	General . . . . . 776
□ Section 2302	Definitions . . . . . 776
□ Section 2302	Design Requirements . . . . . 779
□ Section 2303	Minimum Standards and Quality . . . . . 779
□ Section 2304	General Construction Requirements . . . . . 790
□ Section 2305	General Design Requirements for Lateral-Force-Resisting Systems . . . . . 802
□ Section 2306	Allowable Stress Design . . . . . 803
□ Section 2307	Load and Resistance Factor Design . . . . . 809
□ Section 2308	Conventional Light-Frame Construction . . . . . 809
□ Section 2309	Wood Frame Construction Manual . . . . . 853
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . . 854

## Chapter 24 Glass and Glazing . . . . . **857**

□ Section 2403	General Requirements for Glass . . . . .	858
□ Section 2404	Wind, Snow, Seismic, and Dead Loads on Glass . . . . .	858
□ Section 2405	Sloped Glazing and Skylights . . . . .	860
□ Section 2406	Safety Glazing . . . . .	863

□ Section 2407	Glass in Handrails and Guards . . . . .	874
□ Section 2408	Glazing in Athletic Facilities . . . . .	875
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	875

## Chapter 25 Gypsum Board, Gypsum Panel Products, and Plaster . . . . . **877**

□ Section 2501	General . . . . .	878
□ Section 2508	Gypsum Construction . . . . .	878
□ Section 2510	Lathing and Furring for Cement Plaster (Stucco) . . . . .	880
□ Section 2511	Interior Plaster . . . . .	881
□ Section 2512	Exterior Plaster . . . . .	882
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	884

## Chapter 26 Plastic . . . . . **885**

□ Section 2603	Foam Plastic Insulation . . . . .	886
□ Section 2605	Plastic Veneer . . . . .	891
□ Section 2606	Light-Transmitting Plastics . . . . .	892
□ Section 2608	Light-Transmitting Plastic Glazing . . . . .	892
□ Section 2609	Light-Transmitting Plastic Roof Panels . . . . .	893
□ Section 2610	Light-Transmitting Plastic Skylight Glazing . . . . .	892
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	894

## Chapter 27 Electrical . . . . . **895**

□ Section 2702	Emergency and Standby Power Systems . . . . .	896
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## Chapter 28 Mechanical . . . . . **899**

## Chapter 29 Plumbing . . . . . **901**

□ Section 2902	Minimum Plumbing Facilities . . . . .	902
□ KEY POINTS	. . . . .	906

**Chapter 30  
Elevators and Conveying Systems ...907**

- Section 3002 Hoistway Enclosures ..... 908
- Section 3003 Emergency Operations .... 911
- Section 3006 Elevator Lobbies and Hoistway Opening Protection ..... 911
- Section 3007 Fire Service Access Elevator ..... 913
- Section 3008 Occupant Evacuation Elevators ..... 914
- KEY POINTS ..... 914

**Chapter 31  
Special Construction .....915**

- Section 3102 Membrane Structures ..... 916
- Section 3104 Pedestrian Walkways and Tunnels ..... 917
- Section 3106 Marquees ..... 918
- KEY POINTS ..... 919

**Chapter 32  
Encroachments into the Public Right-of-Way .....921**

- Section 3201 General ..... 922
- Section 3202 Encroachments ..... 922

**Chapter 33  
Safeguards During Construction ....927**

- Section 3302 Construction Safeguards... 928
- Section 3303 Demolition ..... 928
- Section 3304 Site Work ..... 928
- Section 3306 Protection of Pedestrians... 930
- Section 3307 Protection of Adjoining Property ..... 932
- Section 3308 Temporary Use of Streets, Alleys, and Public Property ..... 933

- Section 3309 Fire Extinguishers ..... 933
- Section 3310 Means of Egress ..... 933
- Section 3311 Standpipes ..... 933
- KEY POINTS ..... 934

**Chapter 34  
Reserved .....935**

**Chapter 35  
Referenced Standards .....937**

**Appendices .....939**

- Appendix A Employee Qualifications ... 940
- Appendix B Board of Appeals ..... 940
- Appendix C Group U Agricultural Buildings ..... 941
- Appendix D Fire Districts ..... 941
- Appendix E Supplementary Accessibility Requirements ..... 943
- Appendix F Rodentproofing ..... 943
- Appendix G Flood-Resistant Construction ..... 944
- Appendix H Signs ..... 944
- Appendix I Patio Covers ..... 944
- Appendix J Grading ..... 945
- Appendix K Administrative Provisions... 945
- Appendix L Earthquake Recording Instrumentation ..... 945
- Appendix M Tsunami-Generated Flood Hazard ..... 945
- Appendix N Replicable Buildings ..... 946

**Metric Conversion Table .....947**

- Metric Units, System International (SI) ... 948
- Soft Metrication ..... 948
- Hard Metrication ..... 948

**Index .....955**

## *Foreword*

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How often have you heard these questions when discussing building codes: “What is the intent of this section?” or, “How do I apply this provision?” This publication offers the code user a resource that addresses much of the intent and application principles of the major provisions of the *2018 International Building Code*<sup>®</sup> (IBC<sup>®</sup>).

It is impossible for building codes and similar regulatory documents to contain enough information, both prescriptive and explanatory narrative, to remove all doubt as to the intent of the various provisions. If such a document were possible, it would be so voluminous that it would be virtually useless.

Because the IBC must be reasonably brief and concise in its provisions, the user must have knowledge of the intent and background of these provisions to apply them appropriately. The IBC places great reliance on the judgment of the building official and design professional for the specific application of its provisions. Where the designer and official have knowledge of the rationale behind the provisions, the design of the building and enforcement of the code will be based on informed judgment rather than arbitrariness or rote procedure.

The information that this handbook provides, coupled with the design professional’s and building official’s experience and education, will result in better use of the IBC and more uniformity in its application. As lengthy as this document may seem, it still cannot provide all of the answers to questions of code intent; that is why the background, training, and experience of the reader must also be called on to properly apply, interpret, and enforce the code provisions.

The preparation of a document of this nature requires consulting a large number of publications, organizations, and individuals. Even so, the intent of many code provisions is not completely documented. Sometimes the discussion is subjective; therefore, individuals may disagree with the conclusions presented. It is, however, important to note that the explanatory narratives are based on many decades of experience by the authors and the other contributors to the manuscript.

## Preface

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Internationally, code officials and design professionals recognize the need for a modern, up-to-date building code addressing the design and installation of building systems through requirements emphasizing performance. The *International Building Code*® (IBC®) meets this need by providing model code regulations that safeguard the public health and safety in all communities, large and small. The *2018 IBC Illustrated Handbook* is a valuable resource for those who design, plan, review, inspect, or construct buildings or other structures regulated by the 2018 IBC.

The IBC is one of a family of codes published by the International Code Council® (ICC®) that establishes comprehensive minimum regulations for building systems using prescriptive and performance-related provisions. It is founded on broad-based principles that use new materials and new building designs. Additionally, the IBC is compatible with the entire family of International Codes® published by the ICC.

There are three major subdivisions to the IBC:

1. The text of the IBC
2. The referenced standards listed in Chapter 35
3. The appendices

The first 34 chapters of the IBC contain both prescriptive and performance provisions that are to be applied. Chapter 35 contains those referenced standards that, although promulgated and published by separate organizations, are considered part of the IBC as applicable. The provisions of the appendices do not apply unless specifically included in the adoption ordinance of the jurisdiction enforcing the code.

The *2018 IBC Illustrated Handbook* is designed to present commentary only for those portions of the code for which commentary is helpful in furthering the understanding of the provision and its intent. This handbook uses many drawings and figures to help clarify the application and intent of many code provisions.

The handbook examines the intent and application of many provisions for both the non-structural- and structural-related aspects of the IBC. It addresses in detail many requirements that are considered as “fire- and life-safety” provisions of the code. Found in IBC Chapters 3 through 10, these provisions focus on the important considerations of occupancy and type of construction classification, allowable building size, fire and smoke protection features, fire protection systems, interior finishes, and means of egress.

The discussion of the structural provisions in this handbook is intended to help code users understand and properly apply the requirements in Chapters 16 through 23 of the 2018 IBC. Although useful to a broad range of individuals, the discussion of the structural provisions was written primarily so that building officials, plans reviewers, architects, and engineers can get a general understanding of the IBC’s structural requirements and gain some insight into their underlying basis and intent. To that end, the numerous figures, tables, and examples are intended to illustrate and help clarify the proper application of many structural provisions of the IBC.

Because the IBC adopts many national standards by reference rather than transcribing the structural provisions of the standards into the code itself, in some cases the discussion in this handbook pertains to the provisions found in a referenced standard such as ASCE 7 or ACI 318

rather than the IBC. The structural provisions addressed focus on the general design requirements related to structural load effects; special inspection and verification, structural testing, and structural observation; foundations and soils; and specific structural materials design requirements for concrete, masonry, steel, and wood.

Questions or comments concerning this handbook are encouraged. Please direct any correspondence to [handbook@iccsafe.org](mailto:handbook@iccsafe.org).

**Participation in ICC Code Development Process.** Architects, engineers, designers, builders, and other professionals can freely participate in the ICC Code Development Process by submitting proposed code changes, collaborating with colleagues in developing code language and submitting changes, participating in giving testimony, and becoming ICC members to have voting opportunities in person or online at Committee Action Hearings. The Code Development Process is conducted via the ICC's state-of-the-art, cloud-based cdpACCESS system. Committee Action Hearings and Public Comment Hearings are broadcast live so anyone can follow the testimonies and actions taken. All building design and construction professionals are encouraged to participate in the ICC Code Development Process and have a say in the outcome of future editions of the *International Building Code* or any other of the ICC International Codes. Because architects, engineers, and other design and construction professionals apply the code to actual buildings and experience first-hand the effectiveness of code provisions, it is very critical for them to participate in the Code Development Process and improve the code each cycle.

For the details of the Code Development Process, go to <https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/ICC-CDP-How-It-Works.pdf>. For information on cdpACCESS, go to <https://www.iccsafe.org/cdpaccess/>.



## *Acknowledgments*

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The publication of this handbook is based on many decades of experience by the authors and the other contributors. Since its initial publication, the handbook has become a living document subject to changes and refinements as newer code regulations are released. This latest edition reflects extensive modifications based on the requirements found in the *2018 International Building Code*<sup>®</sup> (IBC<sup>®</sup>).

The initial handbook, on which the nonstructural portions of this document are based, was published in 1988. It was authored by Vincent R. Bush. In developing the discussions of intent, Mr. Bush drew heavily on his 25 years of experience in building safety regulation. Mr. Bush, a structural engineer, was intimately involved in code development work for many years.

In addition to the expertise of Mr. Bush, major contributions were made by John F. Behrens. Mr. Behrens's qualifications were as impressive as the original author's. He had vast experience as a building official, code consultant, and seminar instructor. Mr. Behrens provided the original manuscript of the means of egress chapter and assisted in the preparation of many other chapters.

Revisions to the handbook occurred regularly over the years, with content based on the provisions of the *International Building Code* authored by Doug Thornburg, AIA, CBO. Mr. Thornburg, a certified building official and registered architect, has over 38 years of experience in the building regulatory profession. Previously a building inspector, plans reviewer, building code administrator, seminar instructor, and code consultant, he is currently the Vice President and Technical Director of Product Development at the International Code Council<sup>®</sup> (ICC<sup>®</sup>). In his present role, Mr. Thornburg develops and reviews technical publications, reference books, resource materials, and educational programs relating to the International Codes<sup>®</sup>. He continues to present building code seminars nationally and has developed numerous educational texts, including *Significant Changes to the IBC, 2018 Edition*. Mr. Thornburg was presented with the ICC's inaugural Educator of the Year Award in 2008, recognizing his outstanding contributions in education and training.

The basis of the discussion on the structural provisions in the *2018 IBC Illustrated Handbook* is the *2000 IBC Handbook—Structural Provisions*, authored by S. K. Ghosh, Ph.D., and Robert Chittenden, SE. Both authors have extensive knowledge, expertise, and experience in the development of many of the structural provisions of the IBC. Dr. Ghosh initially authored Chapters 16 and 19, and Mr. Chittenden authored Chapters 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 23. John Henry, PE, a former ICC principal staff engineer, authored the commentary addressing IBC Chapters 16 through 23 for the past several editions. Mr. Henry was presented with the ICC's John Nosse Award for Technical Excellence in 2011, recognizing his outstanding contributions and technical expertise. He is now a consulting engineer in private practice.

The structural provisions in relation to Chapters 16 through 23 in this edition have been updated by both William C. Bracken, PE, and Chris Kimball, SE. Mr. Bracken is a current ICC subject matter expert on curriculum development and delivery and a registered civil and structural engineer, and has 30 years of experience with structural, building envelope, general civil, floodplain, construction, and forensic engineering projects. He was also presented with the ICC's 2017 Educator of the Year Award, recognizing his dedication to training.



Mr. Kimball is currently the Vice President of West Coast Code Consultants, Inc., in addition to providing structural training on behalf of the ICC. He is a licensed structural engineer, ICC master code professional, certified building official, and fire code official, and holds numerous other certifications. Mr. Kimball specializes in providing plan review services to jurisdictions throughout the western United States and is often asked to provide code training to building officials, design professionals, and contractors.

Great appreciation is due to Sandra Hyde, PE, ICC senior staff engineer, for her review of and input into the structural chapters in this edition.

The information and opinions expressed in this handbook are those of the present and past authors, as well as the many contributors, and do not necessarily represent the official position of the International Code Council. Additionally, the opinions may not represent the viewpoint of any enforcing agency. Opinions expressed in this handbook are only intended to be a resource in the application of the IBC, and the building official is not obligated to accept such opinions. The building official is the final authority in rendering interpretations of the code.