2015
INTERNATIONAL
BUILDING CODE®
ILLUSTRATED
HANDBOOK
About the International Code Council

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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Online Bonus Resources

Enhance Your 2015 IBC Illustrated Handbook Reading Experience. The 2015 International Building Code® Illustrated Handbook includes a variety of helpful bonus resources just right for you. These online bonus features, which are designed to enhance your expertise and knowledge of various building code provisions, include:

- FEMA/NEHRP/NIST publications related to earthquake safety and seismic design
- Articles by expert engineers on changes to the latest structural material standards
- ATC wind speed site that provides site-specific wind speeds for use with ASCE 7-10
- ICC guidelines for acoustics and commissioning
- Helpful articles from the ICC’s Building Safety Journal
- Resources related to accessible means of egress and fire protection
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Scope and Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Section 109</td>
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<td>Section 110</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Section 111</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Section 112</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>KEY POINTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definitions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>KEY POINTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Use and Occupancy Classification</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 304</td>
</tr>
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<td>Section 305</td>
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<td><strong>Section 306</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 307</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 308</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 310</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 311</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 312</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>KEY POINTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong>&lt;br&gt;Special Detailed Requirements Based on Use and Occupancy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 402</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 403</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 404</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 416</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section 417</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 418</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 419</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 420</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5
General Building Heights and Areas .................................. 131
- Section 501 General .............................................. 132
- Section 503 General Building Height and Area Limitations ...... 132
- Section 504 Building Height and Number of Stories .................. 135
- Section 505 Mezzanines and Equipment Platforms .................. 136
- Section 506 Building Area .......................................... 140
- Section 507 Unlimited-Area Buildings ................................ 154
- Section 508 Mixed Use and Occupancy ................................ 162
- Section 509 Incidental Uses ........................................ 173
- Section 510 Special Provisions ...................................... 176
- KEY POINTS .................................................. 180

Chapter 6
Types of Construction ............................................... 183
- Section 602 Construction Classification ................................ 184
- Section 603 Combustible Material in Type I and II Construction .... 193
- KEY POINTS .................................................. 195

Chapter 7
Fire and Smoke Protection Features .................................. 197
- Section 703 Fire-Resistance Ratings and Fire Tests ................. 198
- Section 704 Fire-Resistance Rating of Structural Members ............ 205
- Section 705 Exterior Walls .......................................... 210
- Section 706 Fire Walls ............................................. 224
- Section 707 Fire Barriers ........................................... 235
- Section 708 Fire Partitions .......................................... 237
- Section 709 Smoke Barriers ........................................ 240
- Section 710 Smoke Partitions ...................................... 241
- Section 711 Floor and Roof Assemblies ................................ 241
- Section 712 Vertical Openings ...................................... 243
- Section 713 Shaft Enclosures ....................................... 245
- Section 714 Penetrations ........................................... 248
- Section 715 Joint Systems .......................................... 257
- Section 716 Opening Protectives .................................... 260
- Section 717 Ducts and Air Transfer Openings ....................... 265
- Section 718 Concealed Spaces ...................................... 271
- Section 719 Fire-Resistance Requirements for Plaster ............... 276
- Section 720 Thermal- and Sound-Insulating Materials ............... 277
- Section 721 Prescriptive Fire Resistance ............................ 277
- Section 722 Calculated Fire Resistance .............................. 282
- KEY POINTS .................................................. 282

Chapter 8
Interior Finishes ..................................................... 285
- Section 801 General .............................................. 286
- Section 803 Wall and Ceiling Finishes ................................ 287
- Section 804 Interior Floor Finish .................................... 290
- Section 805 Combustible Materials in Types I and II Construction . 291
- KEY POINTS .................................................. 291

Chapter 9
Fire Protection Systems ............................................. 293
- Section 901 General .............................................. 294
- Section 903 Automatic Sprinkler Systems ............................ 297
- Section 904 Alternative Automatic Fire-Extinguishing Systems .... 316
- Section 905 Standpipe Systems ..................................... 317
- Section 907 Fire Alarm and Detection Systems ...................... 322
- Section 909 Smoke-Control Systems ................................ 328
- Section 910 Smoke and Heat Removal .............................. 331
- Section 911 Fire Command Center .................................. 332
- Section 914 Emergency Responder Safety Features ................. 332
- KEY POINTS .................................................. 333
Chapter 10
Means of Egress

1. Section 1001 Administration
2. Section 1002 Definitions
3. Section 1003 General Means of Egress
4. Section 1004 Occupant Load
5. Section 1005 Means of Egress Sizing
6. Section 1006 Number of Exits and Exit Access Doorways
7. Section 1007 Exit and Exit Access Doorway Configuration
8. Section 1008 Means of Egress Illumination
9. Section 1009 Accessible Means of Egress
10. Section 1010 Doors, Gates, and Turnstiles
11. Section 1011 Stairways
12. Section 1012 Ramps
13. Section 1013 Exit Signs
14. Section 1014 Handrails
15. Section 1015 Guards
16. Section 1016 Exit Access
17. Section 1017 Exit Access Travel Distance
18. Section 1018 Aisles
19. Section 1019 Exit Access Stairways and Ramps
20. Section 1020 Corridors
21. Section 1021 Egress Balconies
22. Section 1022 Exits
23. Section 1023 Interior Exit Stairways and Ramps
24. Section 1024 Exit Passageways
25. Section 1025 Luminous Egress Path Markings
26. Section 1026 Horizontal Exits
27. Section 1027 Exterior Exit Stairways and Ramps
28. Section 1028 Exit Discharge
29. Section 1029 Assembly
30. Section 1030 Emergency Escape and Rescue
31. KEY POINTS

Chapter 11
Accessibility

1. Section 1101 General
2. Section 1102 Definitions
3. Section 1103 Scoping Requirements
4. Section 1104 Accessible Route
5. Section 1105 Accessible Entrances
6. Section 1106 Parking and Passenger Loading Facilities
7. Section 1107 Dwelling Units and Sleeping Units
8. Section 1108 Special Occupancies
9. Section 1109 Other Features and Facilities
10. Section 1110 Recreational Facilities
11. Section 1111 Signage
12. KEY POINTS

Chapter 12
Interior Environment

1. Section 1203 Ventilation
2. Section 1204 Temperature Control
3. Section 1205 Lighting
4. Section 1206 Yards or Courts
5. Section 1207 Sound Transmission
6. Section 1208 Interior Space Dimensions
7. Section 1209 Access to Unoccupied Spaces
8. Section 1210 Toilet and Bathroom Requirements
9. KEY POINTS

Chapter 13
Energy Efficiency

1. Section 1305 Installation of Wall Coverings
2. Section 1304 Materials
3. Section 1303 Performance Requirements
4. Section 1302 Definitions
5. KEY POINTS
Section 1406  Combustible Materials on the Exterior Side of Exterior Walls  522
Section 1407  Metal Composite Materials  524
Section 1408  Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS)  524
KEY POINTS  525

Chapter 15  
Roof Assemblies and Rooftop Structures  527

Section 1502  Definitions  528
Section 1504  Performance Requirements  528
Section 1505  Fire Classification  529
Section 1506  Materials  531
Section 1510  Rooftop Structures  531
KEY POINTS  534

Introduction to the Structural Provisions  535

Structural Design (Chapter 16): Nonseismic  537
Structural Design (Chapter 16): Seismic  537
Structural Design (Chapter 16): Load Combinations  539

Chapter 16  
Structural Design  541

Introduction  542
Section 1601  General  542
Section 1602  Definitions and Notations  543
Section 1603  Construction Documents  543
Section 1604  General Design Requirements  543
Section 1605  Load Combinations  551
Section 1606  Dead Loads  553
Section 1607  Live Loads  554
Section 1608  Snow Loads  565
Section 1609  Wind Loads  568
Section 1610  Soil Lateral Loads  575
Section 1611  Rain Loads  576
Section 1612  Flood Loads  577
Section 1613  Earthquake Loads  578
Section 1614  Atmospheric Ice Loads  584
Section 1615  Structural Integrity  585
KEY POINTS  585
Example 16-1  Design Axial Force, Shear Force, and Bending Moment for Shear Wall Due to Lateral and Gravity Loads (Strength Design)  587
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)  588
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)  589
Example 16-4  Calculations of Live Load Reduction  590

Chapter 17  
Special Inspections and Tests  593

Introduction  594
Section 1701  General  595
Section 1702  Definitions  595
Section 1703  Approvals  597
Section 1704  Special Inspections and Tests, Contractor Responsibility, and Structural Observations  604
Section 1705  Required Special Inspections and Tests  610
Section 1706  Design Strengths of Materials  624
Section 1707  Alternate Test Procedures  624
Section 1708  In Situ Load Tests  624
Section 2204

Chapter 18
Soils and Foundations .......... 633

Introduction ................. 634
Section 1801 General ........... 634
Section 1802 Definitions ...... 635
Section 1803 Geotechnical Investigations ....... 635
Section 1804 Excavation, Grading, and Fill .......... 640
Section 1805 Dampproofing and Waterproofing ....... 641
Section 1806 Presumptive Load-Bearing Values of Soils ....... 650
Section 1807 Foundation Walls, Retaining Walls, and Embedded Posts and Poles ....... 651
Section 1808 Foundations ....... 657
Section 1809 Shallow Foundations ....... 662
Section 1810 Deep Foundations ....... 668
KEY POINTS ................. 695

Chapter 19
Concrete .......... 697

Introduction .......... 698
Section 1901 General .......... 699
Section 1902 Definitions .......... 699
Section 1903 Specifications for Tests and Materials .......... 700
Section 1904 Durability Requirements .......... 700
Section 1905 Modifications to ACI 318 .......... 701
Section 1906 Structural Plain Concrete .......... 704
Section 1907 Minimum Slab Provisions .......... 704
Section 1908 Shotcrete .......... 705
KEY POINTS .......... 706

Chapter 20
Aluminum .......... 709

Introduction .......... 710
Section 2002 Materials .......... 710
KEY POINTS .......... 711

Chapter 21
Masonry .......... 713

Introduction .......... 714
Section 2101 General .......... 715
Section 2102 Definitions and Notations .......... 717
Section 2103 Masonry Construction Materials .......... 718
Section 2104 Construction .......... 720
Section 2105 Quality Assurance .......... 721
Section 2106 Seismic Design .......... 721
Section 2107 Allowable Stress Design .......... 726
Section 2108 Strength Design of Masonry .......... 728
Section 2109 Empirical Design of Masonry .......... 730
Section 2110 Glass Unit Masonry .......... 731
Section 2111 Masonry Fireplaces .......... 732
Section 2112 Masonry Heaters .......... 732
Section 2113 Masonry Chimneys .......... 732
KEY POINTS .......... 733

Chapter 22
Steel .......... 735

Introduction .......... 736
Section 2201 General .......... 736
Section 2202 Definitions .......... 736
Section 2203 Identification and Protection of Steel for Structural Purposes .......... 736
Section 2204 Connections .......... 737
Section 2205 Structural Steel .......... 739
Section 2206 Composite Structural Steel and Concrete Structures .......... 741
Section 2207 Steel Joists .......... 741
Section 2208 Steel Cable Structures .......... 744
Section 2209 Steel Storage Racks .......... 744
Section 2210 Cold-Formed Steel .......... 744
Section 2211 Cold-Formed Steel Light-Framed Construction .......... 747
KEY POINTS .......... 750
Chapter 23
Wood ........................................ 753
\- Introduction ................................ 754
\- Section 2301 General .................. 754
\- Section 2302 Definitions .............. 757
\- Section 2303 Minimum Standards and Quality ............. 759
\- Section 2304 General Construction Requirements .......... 773
\- Section 2305 General Design Requirements for Lateral-Force-Resisting Systems .......... 785
\- Section 2306 Allowable Stress Design ........ 786
\- Section 2307 Load and Resistance Factor Design .......... 793
\- Section 2308 Conventional Light-Frame Construction .......... 793
\- Section 2309 Wood Frame Construction Manual .......... 839
\- KEY POINTS .................................. 839

Chapter 24
Glass and Glazing .......................... 843
\- Section 2403 General Requirements for Glass ............. 844
\- Section 2404 Wind, Snow, Seismic, and Dead Loads on Glass .......... 844
\- Section 2405 Sloped Glazing and Skylights ............. 845
\- Section 2406 Safety Glazing ................. 848
\- Section 2407 Glass in Handrails and Guards ............. 859
\- Section 2408 Glazing in Athletic Facilities .......... 859
\- KEY POINTS .................................. 859

Chapter 25
Gypsum Board, Gypsum Panel Products, and Plaster ........ 861
\- Section 2501 Scope .......................... 862
\- Section 2502 Definitions ................. 862
\- Section 2508 Gypsum Construction .............. 863
\- Section 2510 Lathing and Furring for Cement Plaster (Stucco) ........ 864
\- Section 2511 Interior Plaster ............... 865
\- Section 2512 Exterior Plaster .......... 866
\- KEY POINTS .................................. 868

Chapter 26
Plastic ........................................ 869
\- Section 2603 Foam Plastic Insulation .......... 870
\- Section 2604 Interior Finish and Trim .......... 876
\- Section 2605 Plastic Veneer ............... 876
\- Section 2606 Light-Transmitting Plastics .......... 876
\- Section 2607 Light-Transmitting Plastic Wall Panels .......... 877
\- Section 2608 Light-Transmitting Plastic Glazing .......... 877
\- Section 2609 Light-Transmitting Plastic Roof Panels .......... 877
\- Section 2610 Light-Transmitting Plastic Skylight Glazing .......... 878
\- KEY POINTS .................................. 878

Chapter 27
Electrical ...................................... 881
\- Section 2702 Emergency and Standby Power Systems .......... 882

Chapter 28
Mechanical .................................... 885

Chapter 29
Plumbing ...................................... 887
\- Section 2902 Minimum Plumbing Facilities .......... 888
\- KEY POINTS .................................. 892

Chapter 30
Elevators and Conveying Systems ........ 893
\- Section 3002 Hoistway Enclosures .......... 894
\- Section 3003 Emergency Operations .......... 897
\- Section 3006 Elevator Lobbies and Hoistway Opening Protection .......... 897
\- Section 3007 Fire Service Access Elevator .......... 898
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 2015 International Building Code® (IBC®).

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.
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 *2015 IBC Illustrated Handbook* is a valuable resource for those who design, plan, review, inspect, or construct buildings or other structures regulated by the 2015 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 appendixes

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 appendixes do not apply unless specifically included in the adoption ordinance of the jurisdiction enforcing the code.

The *2015 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 2015 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.
Acknowledgments

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 2015 International Building Code® (IBC®).

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. Behren'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, C.B.O. Mr. Thornburg, a certified building official and registered architect, has over 35 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 of Education and Certification at the International Code Council® (ICC®). In his present role, Mr. Thornburg develops and reviews technical publications, reference books, resource materials, and educational programs relating to the International Codes®. He continues to present building code seminars nationally and has developed numerous educational texts, including Significant Changes to the IBC, 2015 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 2015 IBC Illustrated Handbook is the 2000 IBC Handbook—Structural Provisions, authored by S. K. Ghosh, Ph.D., and Robert Chittenden, S.E. 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, P.E., a former ICC principal staff engineer, is the author of the current commentary addressing IBC Chapters 16 through 23. Mr. Henry, a registered civil engineer and certified plans examiner, has over 28 years of experience in structural-related aspects of building code safety including responsibilities as a design engineer in private practice, plans check engineer, and code consultant. As a member of the product development group while with the ICC, he provided technical support for the International Building Code and developed and presented many seminars on the structural provisions of the IBC. 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.
Acknowledgments

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.