

B3 Fire Code & Care Occupancy



What It Is

- B3 refers to **Group B, Division 3 Care Occupancy** under Fire/ Building Codes, triggered when **three or more residents receive supports** from one agency that might require evacuation assistance.
- Current interpretations by fire marshals can unexpectedly reclassify supportive housing and trigger costly compliance requirements.



Why It Matters

- **Safety:** Care occupancy standards include fire protection systems, evacuation planning, sprinklers, and alarms — essential for residents needing supports.
- **Consistency:** Definitions differ between National Building Code, Ontario Building/Fire Code, and federal expectations — leading to **inconsistent designation and risk** for housing projects.
- **Policy ask:** Standardizing B3 compliant codes for supportive housing **federal funding requirements** could protect residents and reduce risks.



Shared Living Arrangements: Key B3 Care Occupancy Considerations

Resident Needs Matter Most	Classification depends on whether residents require assistance to evacuate safely during emergencies.
Enhanced Fire Safety Standards	May require sprinklers, fire alarms, emergency lighting, fire separations, and evacuation systems.
Staffing & Emergency Preparedness	Adequate staffing, fire safety plans, drills, and evacuation procedures are essential.
Municipal Interpretation Can Differ	Requirements may vary by municipality, fire department, and resident support profile.
Plan Early to Avoid Costly Retrofits	Incorporating safety features during design is more practical and cost-effective.
Insurance & Liability Risks	Non-compliance can create significant legal, operational, and insurance exposure.
Consult Experts Early	Engage fire officials, code consultants, accessibility experts, and municipal planners before development.

B3 In Action

- Wide hallways throughout
- Fire suppression systems
- Fire doors
- Evacuation chairs
- Two wide stairwells at end of hallways



How B3 Care Occupancy Complicates Supportive Housing for People with IDD

- Housing projects may trigger B3 requirements once **3 or more people receiving supports, requiring assistance to egress** live together.
- Buildings considered compliant during construction can become “non-compliant” once supported residents move in.
- Seniors with dementia receiving limited support do not trigger B3.
- **Advocacy: Any building built with government money should be B3 Care Occupancy and Fire Code Compliant**

Walking the Line Between Code Application & Fire Safety

- It is important for building owners, designers, and contractors to be aware of the differences in the definitions of Care Occupancy between the NBCC and the OBC to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements when designing and constructing Care Occupancies in Ontario.
- By following the appropriate requirements, the safety and well-being of the occupants can be ensured.

