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International Existing Building Code Understanding the Compliance Methods

The 2015 edition of the [International Building Code \(IBC\)](#) now requires the use of the [International Existing Building Code \(IEBC\)](#) when a project intends to modify an existing building. This includes repairs, alterations, relocation of buildings, additions and change of occupancy.

The [IEBC](#) is beneficial to the building owner and the project design team, because it allows “flexibility to permit the use of alternative approaches to achieve compliance with minimum requirements” that may be otherwise impractical with full enforcement of the IBC. The intent of the [IEBC](#) is still to maintain minimum levels of safety regarding “fire prevention, structural and life safety features of the rehabilitated building.”

In order to use the [IEBC](#), the design professional and/or applicant must select one of three compliance methods that they feel best suits their scope of work. The three potential compliance methods offer different strategies for dealing with the application of code requirements to the existing building.

Option 1: Prescriptive Compliance Method (Chapter 4)

Generally when using the Prescriptive method, the proposal must comply with the provisions of the [International Building Code \(IBC\)](#). This method has some specific requirements for structural upgrades depending on project scope, and offers some minor exceptions to full compliance with the [IBC](#) in certain scenarios.

Option 2: Work Area Compliance Method (Chapter 5 through 13)

This method categorizes alterations into three levels, based on the scope of work. Each level has specific code provisions and exceptions that may apply to the area of work, the affected building story, or the entire building depending on the scope of the alteration. Projects in levels 2 and 3 must comply with the previous levels' requirements.

Level 1 – Minor alterations that include the removal and replacement or the covering of existing materials, elements, equipment, or fixtures using new materials, elements, equipment, or fixtures that serve the same purpose.

Level 2 – Alterations that include the reconfiguration of space, the addition or elimination of any door or window, the reconfiguration or extension of any system, or the installation of any additional equipment. The majority of tenant improvements fall into this level. Depending on the scope of work, upgrades to sprinkler systems, open floor penetrations, and/or means of egress may be required.

Level 3 –Alterations, including those mentioned in other levels, where the work area exceeds 50% of the building area. In certain situations, this level may require improving safety of certain building features beyond the work area.

Option 3: Performance Compliance Method (Chapter 14)

The Performance method may be the most flexible, but also requires the most thorough evaluation of the existing building. Using a numerical scoring system involving 19 safety parameters and the degree of code compliance for each, this method allows the project design team to show that alterations, while not meeting new construction requirements, improve the current situation.