

Ancillary, Accessory and Incidental Spaces

IN RELATION TO THE PREDOMINANT OCCUPANCY

Comparative analysis under NFPA 101 (2024) and SBC 201 (2024)

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1. Executive summary

The three expressions describe different matters. A correct analysis begins with the actual use of the space, then determines its occupancy classification, and only then selects the applicable mixed-occupancy or incidental-use provisions. Treating the all three words (ancillary = accessory = incidental) as synonyms can produce an unnecessary fire barrier, an incorrect occupancy classification, or an unjustified omission of protection.

Ancillary space

A space that supports the main operation. It does not, by itself, establish an occupancy classification or a fire-resistance requirement.

Accessory occupancy

A subordinate occupancy with a different Chapter 3 SBC 201 classification. It remains individually classified and is evaluated under Section 508.2, including the 10% aggregate story-area limit.¹

Incidental use

A supporting room or system specifically listed in Table 509.1 because it creates a localised risk. It is not separately classified, is limited in area, and receives the protection prescribed by the table.²

Incidental to another occupancy - NFPA 101

A qualifying minor mercantile, business, industrial, storage or below-threshold nonresidential use may be treated as part of the predominant occupancy under Section 6.1.14.1.3.³

2. Scope and terminology

SBC 201 generally speaks of the main occupancy. NFPA 101 uses the term predominant occupancy. For comparative purposes, both expressions identify the principal use against which the supporting space is assessed; however, each code retains its own classification method and consequences.

Question	What it determines	Typical code route
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¹ Saudi Building Code National Committee, *The Saudi General Building Code (SBC 201-CR-2024): Code Requirements* (SBCNC 2024) ss 508.2-508.2.4.

² n(1) commentary to ss 509.1-509.4 and Table 509.1.

³ *NFPA 101: Life Safety Code* (2024 edn, NFPA 2023) s 6.1.14.1.3 and annex A.6.1.14.1.3.

Question	What it determines	Typical code route
What is the room actually used for?	The factual use and hazard	SBC Chapter 3 / NFPA 101 Section 6.1
Is it merely supportive?	Ancillary relationship	Descriptive only; continue the analysis
Is it a different occupancy class?	Accessory or mixed occupancy treatment	Section 508.2, 508.3 or 508.4
Is it listed as a special supporting hazard?	Incidental-use treatment	Table 509.1

3. Ancillary

Ancillary is supportive in nature. It indicates that a space supports or is subordinate to the principal operation. Some examples include toilets, corridors, cleaner rooms, electrical closets, copy rooms and routine staff-support areas. The expression does not itself create a separate occupancy group or determine whether a fire barrier is required.⁴

Ancillary answers: "Why does this space exist?" It does not answer: "What occupancy is it?" or "What protection is required?"

4. Accessory

An accessory occupancy has its own Chapter 3 SBC 201 occupancy classification. Section 508.2 requires the accessory portion to be individually classified, and the code provisions applicable to that classification continue to apply to the relevant portion.⁵ Aggregate accessory occupancies not more than 10% of the floor area of the storey etc. Accordingly, "accessory" does not mean "unregulated"⁶

For example, SBC 201 Section 303.1.2 permits an assembly room with an occupant load below 50, where accessory to another occupancy, to be classified as Group B or as part of that other occupancy. Here, the word accessory describes the relationship of the use; the commentary expressly explains that Section 508.2 does not apply to this small-assembly allowance. This is different from selecting the accessory-occupancy method under Section 508.2.⁷

Accessory to another occupancy in the small-assembly rule can be relational language. Accessory occupancy" in Section 508.2 is a specific mixed-occupancy compliance method.

5. Incidental

An incidental use is also a supporting function but inherits a greater localized fire safety risk. Only the rooms, areas and systems listed in Table 509.1 are regulated as incidental uses. An unlisted room cannot be brought into Section 509 merely because a designer regards it as hazardous or ancillary.⁸

The incidental use is not individually classified. It is included within the predominant occupancy in which it is located. Each incidental use may not occupy more than 10% of the building area of the storey in which it is located. Unlike the accessory-occupancy rule, Section 509.3 does not use the word aggregate; the SBC commentary describes the limit as applying to each incidental use.⁹ Protection is then provided exactly as Table 509.1 SBC 201. Incidental to another occupancy under NFPA 101

NFPA 101 uses a different mechanism. The meaning remains as supporting in nature. Section 6.1.14.1.3 permits areas used for mercantile, business, industrial or storage purposes, when incidental to be part of the predominant occupancy. It also permits a nonresidential use with an occupant load below the threshold established in Section 6.1 to receive that treatment.¹⁰

⁴ (n 1) commentary to ss 508.2 and 509.1; National Fire Protection Association, (n 3) s 6.1.14.1.3.

⁵ (n 1) ss 508.2 and 508.2.1.

⁶ (n 1) s 508.2.4, exceptions 1 and 2.

⁷ (n 1) s 303.1.2.

⁸ (n 1) s 509.1 and Table 509.1.

⁹ (n 1) ss 509.2-509.3.

¹⁰ (n 3) s 6.1.14.1.3.

The nonmandatory Annex illustrates the concept with a newsstand in an office building, a gift shop in a hotel, a small storage area, minor office space, a maintenance area, an assembly use with fewer than 50 persons within a business occupancy, and an educational use with fewer than six persons within an apartment building.¹¹

Where the area does not qualify for the incidental allowance, the multiple occupancy provisions apply. NFPA 101 requires the occupancies to be treated as mixed or separated multiple occupancy.

NFPA 101 Section 6.1.14.1.3 is not the same as SBC 201 Section 509. NFPA uses "incidental" to allow certain minor uses to follow the predominant occupancy; SBC Section 509 uses "incidental use" for listed supporting hazards requiring special protection. NFPA 101 Section 6.1.14.1.3 has no numerical 10% limit.

6. Simple example - 1,000 m² Group B office floor

Assume a 1,000 m² Group B office floor with no other accessory occupancy. The 10% area limit is therefore 100 m².¹²

Space	Why it fits the term	Correct code result
Toilet and cleaner room 20 m ²	They support the office, do not create a different occupancy classification, and are not listed in Table 509.1.	Ancillary description only. Treat them as Group B unless another specific provision applies.
Staff canteen 80 m ² ; occupant load 60	Dining is Group A-2. The canteen occupies 8% of the floor.	Potential accessory occupancy under Section 508.2. It passes the 10% area test, subject to every other Section 508.2 and occupancy-specific requirement. ¹³
Boiler room 30 m ²	The boiler room meets a Table 509.1 threshold. It occupies 3% of the floor.	Incidental use under Section 509. It remains Group B, but the Table 509.1 separation and/or sprinkler protection is required. ¹⁴

10% is an area limit, not a classification label. If the canteen grows to 150 m² (15%), the use is not prohibited; it must instead be analysed under the nonseparated or separated occupancy provisions. The boiler room is incidental because it meets a Table 509.1 entry, not merely because it is below 10%.

7. Conclusion

Ancillary is not a code outcome. It describes a supportive relationship but does not itself decide occupancy classification, area limits, separation or fire protection.

An SBC accessory occupancy remains separately classified. Section 508.2 is a controlled mixed-occupancy route with a 10% aggregate storey-area limit and stated exceptions.

An SBC incidental use is not separately classified. It remains within the surrounding occupancy; each listed incidental use is subject to the 10% area limit and the protection prescribed by Table 509.1.

NFPA 101 uses incidental in a different sense. Section 6.1.14.1.3 NFPA 101 permits certain minor uses to follow the predominant occupancy.

Classification must precede protection decisions. The design reviewer should first determine the actual use and classification, then apply the correct accessory, incidental, mixed or separated occupancy provision.

8. Bibliography

NFPA 101: Life Safety Code (2024)

Saudi Building Code 201 (2024)

¹¹ (n 3) annex A.6.1.14.1.3 and A.6.1.14.1.3(2).

¹² (n 1) ss 508.2-508.2.4 and 509.1-509.4; n 3) ss 6.1.14.1.1-6.1.14.4.2.

¹³ n 1) ss 508.2.1-508.2.4.

¹⁴ (n 1) ss 509.1-509.4 and Table 509.1.