
BULLETIN: OCCUPANT LOAD DETERMINATION AND POSTING IN ASSEMBLY OCCUPANCIES IN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Division of the State Architect (DSA) documents referenced within this publication are available on the [DSA Forms](#) or [DSA Publications](#) webpages.

PURPOSE

This bulletin clarifies responsibilities and the process for posting or changing occupant loads in assembly occupancies. Such occupancies typically include multi-purpose rooms, rooms for viewing of the performing arts, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and libraries. Every room or space which is used for assembly, classroom, dining, or similar purposes having an occupant load of 50 or more persons shall have the occupant load of the room or space posted in a conspicuous place, near the main exit or exit access doorway.

Occupant load means the number of persons for which the means of egress in a building or part thereof is designed. The permissible *occupant load* cannot exceed the maximum number of persons that can safely be accommodated by the *means of egress* provided from a room or area when calculated in accordance with CBC Section 1004.

To exceed occupancy load or fail to post occupancy load signs in the required places can result in a safety hazard.

1. Responsibilities

DSA: During project plan review DSA verifies compliance with California Code of Regulations (CCR) Titles 19 and 24 requirements that includes posting occupant load signs in assembly areas.

School District: Maintains occupant load sign and monitors occupant loads to verify that they do not exceed the limit, as posted.

Local Fire Authority (LFA): During annual school inspections, the LFA personnel may verify compliance with code provisions concerning occupant loads and occupant load signage.

2. Where are requirements in California Building Code for occupant load signs-posting in schools?

See CBC Chapter 10, Section 1004, and CCR Title-19, Division I, Chapter 1, Article 3. Additionally, DSA Interpretation of Regulations (*IR A-26: K-12 Occupancy Classifications and Occupant Load Factors for Community Colleges* and *IR A-26.CC: Occupancy Classification and Load Factors* provide guidelines for application of code requirements for school projects.

3. What action should be taken when an occupant load sign is not posted in an assembly area?

If a school district has an assembly use where an occupant load sign is not visible (e.g., removed or painted over), the school district should utilize the most recent DSA approved construction plans for the building or facility in question to determine the permitted occupant load and requirements for signage. When the construction documents are not available, the school district may contact the appropriate DSA Regional Office to view the documents or obtain a copy of the record set.

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If an occupant load sign is not present in the assembly area and noted as missing by local fire authority (LFA), during an annual school inspection:

- The LFA may obtain occupant load information from DSA approved plans or determine the maximum occupant load from the California Building Code, Chapter 10, Section 1004. The LFA will request the school district to post the maximum occupant load sign near the main entrance to the assembly area. The LFA may contact DSA for assistance.

OR

- If the occupant load is not listed on the approved building plans, the LFA may require the school district to contact DSA to determine maximum occupant load. It would be the responsibility of the school district to provide any information that DSA requires, e.g., plans submitted by a design professional.

4. What is the process for school districts to request an increase in occupant loads?

When a school district requests a permanent increase in permitted occupant load for an assembly room, classroom, space or building, it shall engage a design professional to determine if the change will affect exiting, exit capacity or other building egress requirements, or a change in the seismic design Risk Category (RC).

The design professional shall also review and address any building code impact to the structural system, plumbing fixture count, and or accessibility requirements associated with the increased occupant load.

4.1 If the change does not affect exiting or other building egress requirements

The School District shall engage a design professional to prepare documentation for the signage change, which shall be made available to the local fire authority upon request. Plan submittal to DSA is not required.

Inspection oversight for occupant load changes shall be performed by a DSA certified inspector.

Revised occupant load sign(s) in assembly areas, classrooms or spaces shall be posted and inspected per the documentation prepared by the design professional.

4.2 If the change does affect exiting or other building requirements

The school district shall engage a design professional to prepare plans for sign posting and other modifications required by the California Building Code, e.g., numbers and widths of exits.

Unless it is determined that the project is exempt from DSA review per *IR A-22: Construction Projects and Items Exempt from DSA Review*, plans are required to be submitted to and approved by DSA.

For projects exempt from DSA review, the design and construction must comply with the provisions of IR A-22.

In all cases, inspection oversight for occupant load changes must be performed by a DSA certified inspector.

Revised occupant load sign(s) in assembly areas, classrooms or spaces shall be posted per the approved plans.

4.3 If the increased occupant load value affects the seismic design risk category

The design professional, in coordination with the structural engineer of record, shall submit such designs as necessary to achieve compliance with the provisions associated with the new RC.

A DSA Bulletin is a notification to its stakeholders regarding any issue intended to be directed to a broad group of external stakeholders as well as DSA staff.