BULLETIN 90-7

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Subject: Places of Religious of Worship, Mixed-Use Occupancy

Reference: N.J.A.C. 5:23-3.14, Building Subcode, Sections 303.1, 305.1 and 508

It has been brought to the attention of the Department of Community Affairs that there have been instances when code officials are not properly enforcing the mixed-use and occupancy requirements, Section 508, when reviewing plans for church buildings and houses of worship.

Local enforcing agencies are classifying most churches and houses of worship as Group A-3, regardless of what other facilities may be included in the building. A number of churches and houses of worship have large assembly halls with commercial kitchens which are used for functions other than church services. These portions of the building must be classified per use: serving food or beverage (e.g., banquet hall), Group A-2; general assembly (e.g., community hall), Group A-3.

Some churches and houses of worship have day-care or child-care facilities, which should be properly classified (Group E or I-4, depending on the age and number of occupants). With such ancillary facilities, a church or house of worship becomes a mixed-use building and all the relevant provisions of the Building Subcode section concerning mixed uses (area, exits, fire separation, fire protection, etc.) shall apply.

Lastly, religious educational rooms and religious auditoriums per Section 305.1.1, which are accessory (see Section 303.1.4) to places of religious worship and have occupant loads of less than 100, are to be classified as A-3 occupancies.

Code enforcing agencies are advised to exercise caution in reviewing the plans and carrying out inspections of church buildings and houses of worship so as not to jeopardize the health, safety, and welfare of the public.