

Building classifications

Understanding the NCC

The National Construction Code (NCC) sets out the minimum technical requirements for new buildings (and new building work in existing buildings) in Australia. In doing so, it groups buildings¹ by their function and use. These groups are assigned a classification which is then how buildings are referred to throughout the NCC. This information is crucial for all NCC users. The following is a general representation of the building classifications in the NCC. It is based on a national perspective and does not address any State or Territory variations².



Building classifications

All NCC volumes: Part A6

Building classifications are labelled “Class 1” through to “Class 10”. Some classifications also have sub-classifications, referred to by a letter after the number (e.g. Class 1a).

Class 2 to 9 buildings are mostly covered by Volume One of the NCC, and Class 1 and 10 buildings are mostly covered by Volume Two of the NCC. Volume Three of the NCC refers to all building classifications.

A building may have parts that have different uses. In most cases, each of these parts are classified separately.

A building (or part of a building) may also have more than one use and may be assigned more than one classification.

What is an SOU?

A sole occupancy unit (commonly known as a SOU) is defined in the NCC as part of a building for occupation by an owner/s, lessee, or tenant, to the exclusion of any other owner/s, lessee, or tenant. So put simply, it is a space with an exclusive use in a building.

SOU's can be located in a number of different classifications. They include:

- A residential apartment or flat.
- A self-contained unit.
- A suite of rooms in a hotel or motel.
- A shop in a shopping centre.

¹ In this document, a building may also refer to a structure such as swimming pool.

² State and Territory variations and additions to the NCC are located in the NCC. The NCC is available at the ABCB website.



Class 1 buildings

Class 1 buildings are houses. Typically, they are standalone single dwellings of a domestic or residential nature.

These buildings can also be horizontally attached to other Class 1 buildings. When attached they are commonly referred to as duplexes, terrace houses, row houses and townhouses. In these situations, they must be separated by a wall that has fire-resisting and sound insulation properties.

The Class 1 classification includes two sub-classifications: Class 1a and Class 1b.

A **Class 1a** building is a single dwelling being a detached house; or one of a group of attached dwellings being a town house, row house or the like.

A **Class 1b** building is a boarding house, guest house or hostel that has a floor area less than 300 m² and ordinarily has less than 12 people living in it. It can also be four or more single dwellings located on one allotment which are used for short-term holiday accommodation.

Did you know?

Class 1 buildings cannot be located above or below any other dwelling (or any other class of building) other than a private garage.



Class 2 buildings

Class 2 buildings are apartment buildings. They are typically multi-unit residential buildings where people live above and below each other. The NCC describes the space which would be considered the apartment as a sole-occupancy unit (SOU).

Class 2 buildings may also be single storey attached dwellings where there is a common space below. For example, two dwellings above a common basement or carpark.

Is it a Class 1b, 2 or 3 residential building?

Classification is a process for understanding risk in a building (or part of a building) according to its use.

Where it is unclear which classification should apply, the approval authority has the discretion to decide.



Class 3 buildings

Class 3 applies to residential buildings other than Class 1 or Class 2 buildings, or a Class 4 part of a building. Class 3 buildings are a common place of long term or transient living for a number of unrelated people. Examples include a boarding house, guest house, hostel or backpackers (that are larger than the limits for a Class 1b building).

Class 3 buildings could also include dormitory style accommodation, or workers' quarters for shearers or fruit pickers.

Class 3 buildings may also be "care-type" facilities (such as accommodation buildings for children, the elderly, or people with a disability) which are not Class 9 buildings.

Did you know?

Class 3 includes residential care buildings and the residential parts of hotels, motels, schools, or jails.



Class 4 part of a building

A Class 4 part of a building is a sole dwelling or residence within a building of a non-residential nature. An example of a Class 4 part of a building would be a caretaker's residence in a storage facility. A Class 4 part can only be located in a Class 5 to 9 building.

Is it the only residence in the building?

If so, then it is likely to be a Class 4 part of a building. There can only be one Class 4 part in a building.

A Class 4 part cannot be located in a Class 1, 2 or 3 building.



Class 5 buildings

Class 5 buildings are office buildings used for professional or commercial purposes.

Examples of Class 5 buildings are offices for lawyers, accountants, government agencies and architects.

When is a general medical practitioner's office not a Class 5 building?

Generally, a general medical practitioner's office will be a Class 5 building. However, if any medical treatment administered leaves patients unconscious or non-ambulatory, then the building would be considered a health-care building (as defined by the NCC) and therefore a Class 9a building.



Class 6 buildings

Class 6 buildings are typically shops, restaurants and cafés. They are a place for the sale of retail goods or the supply of services direct to the public. Some examples are:

- A dining room, bar, shop or kiosk part of a hotel or motel.
- A hairdresser or barber shop.
- A public laundry.
- A market or showroom.
- A funeral parlour.
- A shopping centre.

Is a service station a Class 6 building?

Yes, as they are intended for the servicing of cars and the sale of fuel or other goods.

However, the term “service station” does not cover buildings where panel beating, auto electrical, tyre replacement or the like are solely carried out. These are Class 8 buildings.



Class 7 buildings

Class 7 buildings are storage-type buildings. The Class 7 classification has two sub-classifications: Class 7a and Class 7b.

Class 7a buildings are car parks.

Class 7b buildings are typically warehouses, storage buildings or buildings for the display of goods (or produce) that is for wholesale.

Did you know?

Reference to wholesale means “sale to people in the trades or in the business of ‘on-selling’ goods and services to another party (including the public)”.



Class 8 buildings

A factory is the most common way to describe a Class 8 building. It is a building in which a process (or handicraft) is carried out for trade, sale, or gain.

The building can be used for production, assembling, altering, repairing, finishing, packing, or cleaning of goods or produce. It includes buildings such as a mechanic's workshop. It may also be a building for food processing, such as an abattoir.

A laboratory is also a Class 8 building, even though it may be small. This is due to the high fire hazard potential.

Are farm buildings Class 7, 8, or 10a?

It depends on the occupancy, use and size. Buildings used for farming-type purposes are often very diverse in nature. For example, a shed for parking a single tractor may be Class 10a, however if multiple tractors and other farm machinery is parked, the building may be Class 7a (or even Class 8 if mechanics were employed to regularly work on the machinery within the building).

The NCC defines a difference between a farm shed and a farm building. It also contains specific Deemed-to-Satisfy Provisions for these buildings under Part H3.



Class 9 buildings

Class 9 buildings are buildings of a public nature. The Class 9 classification has three sub-classifications: Class 9a, Class 9b and Class 9c.

Class 9a buildings are generally hospitals, referred to in the NCC as health-care buildings. They are buildings in which occupants or patients are undergoing medical treatment and may need physical assistance to evacuate in the case of an emergency. This includes a clinic (or day surgery) where the effects of the treatment administered involve patients becoming unconscious or unable to move. This in turn requires supervised medical care (on the premises) for some time after treatment has been administered.

Class 9b buildings are assembly buildings in which people may gather for social, theatrical, political, religious or civil purposes. They include schools, universities, childcare centres, pre-schools, sporting facilities, night clubs, or public transport buildings.

Class 9c buildings are residential care buildings that may contain residents who have various care level needs. They are a place of residence where 10% or more of persons who reside there need physical assistance in conducting their daily activities and to evacuate the building during an emergency. An aged care building, where residents are provided with personal care services, is a Class 9c building.

Did you know?

Laboratories that are part of health-care buildings are classified as Class 9a buildings despite the general classification of laboratories being Class 8.



Class 10 buildings or structures

Class 10 buildings are non-habitable buildings or structures. Class 10 includes three sub-classifications: Class 10a, Class 10b and Class 10c.

Class 10a buildings are non-habitable buildings including sheds, carports, and private garages.

Class 10b is a structure being a fence, mast, antenna, retaining wall, swimming pool, or the like.

A **Class 10c** building is a private bushfire shelter. A private bushfire shelter is a structure associated with, but not attached to, a Class 1a building.

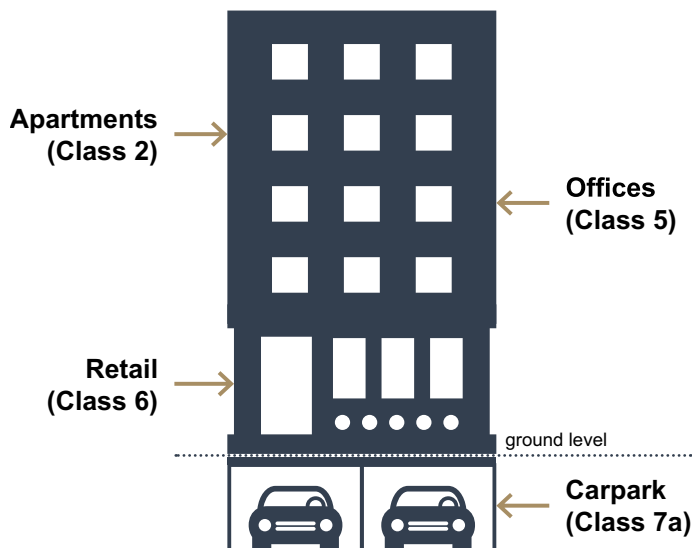
What is a private garage?

- A garage associated with a Class 1 building; or
- A single storey of a building containing not more than 3 vehicle spaces (limited to only one storey within a building); or
- Any separate single storey garage associated with another building that contains no more than 3 vehicles.



Mixed use buildings

As buildings can have mixed uses, they can also have mixed (or multiple) classifications. For example, a building may have a basement carpark (Class 7a) with ground floor retail space (Class 6) and residential apartments (Class 2) and offices above (Class 5).



How big must a part of a building be to have its own classification?

Every part of a building must be separately classified. However, where a part has a different purpose and is not more than 10% of the floor area of the storey it is on, subject to some limitations it may be considered ancillary to the major use and adopt its classification.

For instance, if a single storey warehouse (Class 7b) has an office (normally Class 5) which takes up only 8% of the floor area, the whole building can be classified as a Class 7b. However, if the office takes up 12% of the floor area then the warehouse (Class 7b) and office (Class 5) must be classified separately.



Multiple building classifications

A building (or a part of a building) may be designed to serve multiple purposes and may have more than one classification. This means that it is permissible for a building to be Class 6/7, or Class 5/6, or whatever is deemed appropriate. This allows flexibility in how the building might be used. For example, if a building is intended for retail shopping, storage or office space, it may be designed as a Class 5/6/7 building.

At the design stage it may not be clear who the final tenant will be (or how they will be using their tenancy), so as long as the design meets the minimum requirements of all the classifications it could be used for any of the purposes.