



Washington State Building Code Council

Improving the built environment by promoting health, safety and welfare

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STATE BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION No. 17-14

CODE: 2015 International Building Code

SECTION: IBC 312 Utility and Miscellaneous Group U

QUESTION: Section 312 of the 2015 IBC classifies a greenhouse as a group U occupancy, but does not give a definition of a greenhouse.

Greenhouse is defined in the Washington state energy code (WSEC) chapter 2:

A permanent structure or a thermally isolated area of a building that maintains a specialized sunlit environment that is used exclusively for, and is essential to, the cultivation, protection or maintenance of plants. Greenhouses are those that are erected for a period of 180 days or more.

According to this definition, only a building with a transparent roof system that permits sunlight in for the growth of plants would be a greenhouse.

The WSEC defines “controlled plant growth environment”:

Group F and U buildings or spaces that are specifically controlled to facilitate and enhance plant growth and production by manipulating various indoor environment conditions. Technologies include indoor agriculture, cannabis growing, hydroponics, aquaculture and aquaponics. Controlled indoor environment variables include, but are not limited to, temperature, air quality, humidity, and carbon dioxide.

What would the occupancy classification be for a building that meets both the definition of a greenhouse (supplies natural light) and a controlled plant growth environment (supplies heat, artificial light and ventilation when needed for year round growing)?
Would this building be classified as Group U?

ANSWER: **Yes, depending on the use of the building. IBC Section 312 as amended in the state building code describes a Group U greenhouse as “used for cultivation, protection or maintenance of plants”. If the building is limited to this use, a Group U classification is appropriate. If the use includes any assembling, disassembling, fabricating, finishing, manufacturing, packaging, repair or processing, a Group F-1 classification would be appropriate.**

SUPERSEDES: None

REQUESTED BY: City of Moses Lake