The Guide to the Building Code of Australia clarifies 'sole-occupancy unit'

The purpose of this circular is to give councils, certifiers, industry practitioners and other stakeholders advance notice of the expanded explanation of the definition of sole-occupancy unit in The Guide to Volume One of the Building Code of Australia 2013.

Introduction

Issues have been raised regarding the application of the definition of 'sole-occupancy-unit' (SOU), especially to student accommodation.

The Building Code of Australia (BCA) 2013 and The Guide to Volume One of the BCA 2013 (The Guide) will commence on 1 May 2013.

The Guide provides commentary and explanation on the provisions of Volume One of the BCA.

Action taken

The Australian Building Codes Board has expanded The Guide's explanation of SOU to clarify the intended application.

An extract from The Guide, 2013 edition, including a new illustrative figure, is provided below:

Sole-occupancy unit

A sole-occupancy unit is an area within a building for the exclusive use of the owner or occupier. It is irrelevant if the area is occupied by an individual, a number of people, or by a company. Exclusivity of use is the key factor in determining whether an area or room is a sole-occupancy unit.

Example

Examples of sole-occupancy units include individual flats in a block of flats, a self contained unit, a bedroom and associated ensuite, a suite of rooms in a hotel or motel, bedrooms in an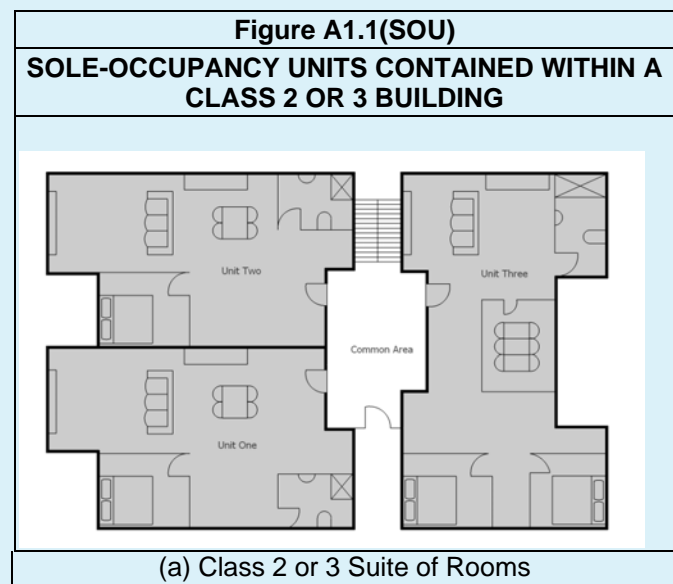 aged care building, a shop in a shopping centre, or an office occupied by an individual *owner* or tenant in an office building.

A sole-occupancy unit may also include a single bedroom or different combinations of related rooms associated with a bedroom exclusively used in a Class 3 building used for student accommodation. For example a bedroom with an associated study room and a small storage room exclusively for the use of a student would be considered a sole-occupancy unit.

In residential applications, a sole-occupancy unit will typically consist of sleeping facilities, sanitary facilities and a living area. See Figure A.1.1(SOU). In situations where the sleeping facilities are the only areas that are for the exclusive use of the owner or occupier the delineation of the sole-occupancy unit will change. In this instance the bedroom becomes the sole-occupancy unit.

Areas that do not comprise a sole-occupancy unit are those intended and available for the use of more than one owner or occupier (what is often called a "common area"). Examples applying to residential type buildings include a laundry; TV room; entertainment room; and kitchen in a boarding house. See Figure A1.1(SOU).

For commercial buildings, spaces generally referred to as "common areas" may include corridors, kitchenettes, lift lobbies and sanitary facilities.

Figure A1.1(SOU)

SOLE-OCCUPANCY UNITS CONTAINED WITHIN A CLASS 2 OR 3 BUILDING

(a) Class 2 or 3 Suite of Rooms

(b) Class 2 or 3 Single Bedroom

Further information

More information is available from the department's Information Centre on 02 9228 6333 or 1300 305 695 or email: information@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Note: This and other building circulars are published on the web at: http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/PlanningSystem/Circularsandguidelines/Buildingsystemcirculars/tabid/82/Default.aspx

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