



# INFORMATION BULLETIN

Office of the  
Fire Commissioner

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## Houses used for Boarders, Lodgers and Roomers

This Bulletin provides guidance to assess whether a house, which is being used to provide boarding, lodging, rooming, or other additional accommodation, has become a multiple suite building. This Bulletin does not address local government regulations regarding land use or other local government regulatory bylaws.

A dwelling unit (house), which is altered or occupied to provide accommodation for boarders, lodgers or roomers, may not include the fire and life safety measures that are required in buildings that contain multiple residential suites/tenancies. These safety measures can include appropriate fire separations, means of egress, emergency lighting, smoke alarms and fire extinguishers. The purpose of BC Fire Code Sentence 2.11.1.1.(1) is to extend the application of the current BC Building Code to existing buildings, used for this purpose, to ensure that proper safety measures are in place.

A single dwelling unit (house) is a single suite operated as a housekeeping unit under a single tenancy. In part, the BC Fire and Building Codes define "suite" as a room or series of rooms of complementary use, **operated under a single tenancy**, and includes dwelling units, individual guest rooms in motels, hotels, boarding houses, rooming houses and dormitories.

Single tenancy means all occupants of a living space live as one housekeeping unit with control over all of the living space. Therefore, a building contains more than one dwelling unit or suite when the occupants are limited to controlling only designated areas of the building. The result is a building which has multiple suites/tenancies.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner has determined that a single dwelling unit (house) which is altered or occupied to provide additional accommodation for boarders, lodgers or roomers, by creating an additional suite(s) under the control of the boarders, lodgers or roomers shall conform to the BC Building Code. This means that a site specific evaluation of a building is essential to determine if the required safety features are incorporated. The LAFC has the authority to accept alternatives to the Code requirements if satisfied that an equivalent level of fire and life safety can be achieved.

The Fire Services Act empowers the LAFC to inspect any premises anywhere in British Columbia to ascertain whether or not the premises are so used or occupied that fire would endanger life or property which could include dwelling units providing accommodation for boarders, lodgers or roomers.

## **Examples of Accommodation**

### **Single Suite**

**Single Housekeeping Unit** – One or more people living in a house under a single tenancy, sharing the control and responsibility of the entire living space.

### **Multiple Suites**

**Rooming House** – Several people are living in a house, each person having a separate tenancy agreement and having control over and responsibility for their own space. This arrangement can include transient accommodation.

**Secondary Suite** – An additional dwelling unit, which is part of a house, such that the house becomes two dwelling units, each being a separate suite.

***The contents of this Information Bulletin are not intended to be provided as legal advice and should not be relied upon as legal advice.***

Information Bulletins are distributed to British Columbia Fire Departments, Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner and where applicable, other related agencies and authorities, in order to provide general information on fire-related issues.

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