

SCHULTE & ASSOCIATES

Building Code Consultants

3500 Creighton Road, K5

Pensacola, FL 32504

fpeschulte@aol.com

847.312.7617

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 110: 1929 (DESIGN OCCUPANT LOAD FACTOR-ASSEMBLY OCCUPANCIES)

By Richard Schulte

The thirty-third Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Memphis, Tennessee in May 1929. Among the Committee Reports heard at the Annual Meeting was the Report of Committee on Safety to Life. The following is an excerpt from the Committee Report addressing the computation of the design occupant load of spaces utilized for assembly:

“2518. CAPACITY. The capacity of places of public assembly shall be the number of persons that can be assembled therein and shall be computed as the number obtained by dividing the number of square feet of floor area of the assembly room proper, exclusive of foyers, lobbies, toilets and other utility rooms in conjunction therewith by six. The capacity of recreation halls where games are played and which are not used for assembly shall be computed as the total floor area in square feet divided by twelve.

NOTE. The use of the figure 6 sq. ft. per person makes allowance for some people occupying standing space. The practice of allowing persons to stand near exits, however, should be discouraged if not prohibited altogether. The utilization of standing space within theatres or motion picture theatres should be prohibited.”

The latest edition of the Life Safety Code differentiates between concentrated assembly occupancies and unconcentrated assembly occupancies. A factor of 7 square feet per person is utilized to compute the design occupant load of a concentrated assembly occupancy, while a factor of 15 square feet per person is utilized to compute the design occupant load of unconcentrated assembly occupancies.

A concentrated assembly occupancy is an occupancy where rows of moveable chairs may be provided, while an unconcentrated assembly occupancy is an occupancy where tables and chairs are provided.

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Source: “*Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual [NFPA] Meeting*”, Memphis, Tennessee, 1929.