

Building Code Change Proposal

Date: 3/11/2026
Title: R-5 Micro Cabins
Topic: Emergency Housing
Code Section: 2024 IBC 202; 310; 429; 903.2.8

Description

The following code proposal intends to address the need for small, detached sleeping spaces to serve as emergency housing.

Background

The International Building Code requires that all residential buildings are provided with an automatic fire sprinkler system. This is problematic for small structures that do not contain plumbing of any kind. Municipalities in other regions have addressed similar concerns to include, but not limited to, the State of California, the City of Seattle, and the City of Denver.

Proposal

To establish a consistent set of building code regulations that will apply to emergency housing installations in accordance with the City of Tucson's Emergency Housing Declaration and to consider permanent code amendments that would extend beyond the duration of the current emergency declaration.

Definitions

Dwelling unit. See IBC or IRC Section 202.

Homing campus (encampment). A collection of buildings, structures, and/or temporary provisions that provide space for sleeping, eating, bathing, clothes washing, sanitary needs, and social services for people lacking adequate housing.

Homing campus hub (services). A building or group of buildings and structures that provide support to people residing in micro cabins, tents, mobile sleeping units, and similar arrangements. Homing campus hubs shall include provisions for cooking and/or food delivery, bathing, sanitary needs, clothes washing and/or laundry service, open space with seating and shade, and social services.

Micro cabin (sleeping space). A single story detached living space intended for sleeping within a homing campus.

Mobile sleeping unit. A mobile unit used for sleeping with fixed or removable wheels. The manufacture of mobile units that meet guidelines for recreational vehicles or manufactured homes shall be governed by the State of Arizona.

Sleeping unit. See IBC Section 202.

Tiny home. See IRC Section 202.

Code Amendments

Section 310.6 Residential Group R-5. ADD new Section 310.6 as follows:

310.6 Residential Group R-5 occupancies containing micro cabins, tents, or mobile sleeping units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature.

Section 429. Homing campus. ADD new Section 429 as follows:

429 – Homing campus

429.1 General. Group R-5 occupancies shall be provided with homing campus hubs that comply with the provisions of Sections 429.2 and other applicable provisions of this code.

429.2 Homing campus hub. Homing campus hubs shall comply with the provisions of Sections 429.2.1 through xxx

429.2.1 Accessibility. An accessible route shall be provided from each sleeping space within a homing campus to the public way and all required services and spaces within a homing campus. When there are four or more micro cabins on a single homing campus, no less than one micro cabin shall have a zero-step entry. When there are twenty or more micro cabins on a single homing campus, no less than five percent of the micro cabins shall have a zero-step entry. Exterior accessible routes shall be sufficiently illuminated in accordance with the limitations of the Tucson-Pima County Outdoor Lighting Code.

429.2.2 Addressing. Each homing hub shall have a street address and unit numbers. Homing hubs utilizing tents or membrane structures for supporting services shall provide address identification in accordance with IFC 505.1 as amended for RV and Mobile Home Parks. Spaces reserved for micro cabins, tents, and mobile sleeping units within a homing campus shall be assigned unit numbers for each individual sleeping space.

429.2.3 Clothes washing. Clothes washing facilities or laundry service shall be provided for each homing campus.

429.2.4 Cooking and dining. Permanent provisions for cooking that comply with the International Mechanical Code or regular food delivery shall be provided for each homing campus

429.2.5 Fire access lane. A fire access lane shall be provided throughout each homing campus to ensure each sleeping unit maintains adequate access for emergency services. 429.2.6 Portable fire extinguishers. Portable fire extinguishers shall be provided for each homing campus spaced no greater than 75 feet in travel distance from each sleeping space and cooking appliance.

429.2.7 Social services. Housing hubs shall provide social services in at least one of the categories listed below.

1. Transitional housing assistance
2. Crisis intervention and trauma counseling
3. Health or behavioral health counseling
4. Domestic violence counseling
5. Workforce preparation and job placement

429.2.8 Toilets, lavatories, and showers. At least one (1) toilet, lavatory, and shower shall be provided per ten (10) occupants in a homing campus. Portable toilet and shower rooms that comply with Title 9 of the Arizona Administrative Code shall be provided with regular service to maintain sanitary conditions with intervals based on use. Temporary toilets and showers shall not be located within 10 feet of public thoroughfare or sidewalk or within 20 feet of an occupied premise. Vehicular access shall be provided within 10 feet of each temporary toilet or shower for service and relocation.

429.2.9 Travel distance. The maximum travel distance from each sleeping space to all supporting services within a homing campus, including but not limited to restrooms and social services, shall not exceed a distance of 500 feet.

429.2.10 Occupancy. Micro cabins, tents, mobile sleeping units, and similar arrangements serving as part of homing campus shall maintain an operational permit issued by the Tucson Fire Department and provide an emergency preparedness plan that meets the requirements of IFC 403 and 404 for Group R-4 Occupancies. Annual inspections shall be provided for each sleeping space serving a homing campus. Such sleeping spaces shall remain weatherproof and in good working condition to maintain occupancy.

429.2.11 Outdoor open space. (shaded areas? Zoning?)

429.2.12 Public transportation. (proximity to public transportation? Zoning?)

429. 3 Micro cabins. Micro cabins serving as sleeping spaces for a homing campus shall comply with the provisions of Sections 429. 3.1 through 429. 3.12.

429. 3.1 Design. Micro cabins shall be designed by a registered design professional licensed in the State of Arizona in accordance with Chapters 16-26 of this code.

429.3.2 Adaptability. Micro cabins shall be provided with the following provisions for adaptability.

1. Minimum door width. Egress doors in micro cabins shall have a nominal width of no less than 34 inches.
2. Operation. Operable parts shall be operable with one hand and shall not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist. The force required to activate operable parts shall be no more than 5.0 pounds.
3. Reach ranges. Switches, receptacles, and controls shall be located no less than 15 inches above the finished floor and no greater than 48 inches above the floor.
4. Changes in floor level. The maximum vertical change in floor level shall be no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.
5. Ramps. Where micro cabins have a finished floor elevation greater than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch above the finished walking surface of the accessible route, portable ramps may be provided with a maximum running slope of 1:12.

429.3.3 Address numbers. Each micro cabin shall have address unit numbers at least 4 inches in height permanently affixed to the exterior wall near the egress door.

429.3.4 Ambulatory and medical care. Micro cabins shall not be considered an extension or component of a Group I Occupancy or intended for use as ambulatory or medical care.

429.3.5 Maximum area. The maximum gross floor area of micro cabins shall not exceed 200 square feet.

429.3.6 Minimum area. Micro cabins shall have no less than 70 square feet of interior floor area with no less than 7 feet in any plan dimension. Micro cabins serving more than one occupant shall have no less than 50 square feet of interior floor area per occupant.

429.3.7 Separation distance. Micro cabins shall have no less than ten (10) feet separation from other buildings, structures, mobile sleeping units, and property lines. A reduction to a

minimum five (5) feet separation may be considered where no less than 1-hour fire-rated assemblies are utilized for all exterior walls and eaves within the ten (10) foot separation.

429.3.8 Interior partitions. Interior partitions in micro cabins shall not reduce the minimum required room area. Interior partitions that separate sleeping areas shall be designed as fire partitions.

429.3.9 Natural light. Micro cabins shall be provided with no less than two (2) square feet of natural light in each sleeping space.

429.3.10 Electrical. Micro cabins shall be provided with electrical in accordance with the adopted electrical code and Sections 429.13.9.1 through 429.13.9.

429.3.10.1 Permanently installed power distribution shall be provided to each micro cabin including a dedicated panelboard, listed and labeled with a disconnecting means.

429.3.10.2 At least one 20-amp general purpose branch circuit shall be provided for each micro cabin to serve general lighting and receptacle loads.

429.3.10.3 A dedicated branch circuit shall be provided to serve heating and cooling equipment.

429.3.10.4 One duplex receptacle shall be provided inside each micro cabin for each occupant. Circuits serving receptacles inside micro cabins shall have arc-fault circuit-interrupter protection. Exterior receptacles shall have ground-fault circuit-interrupter protection. Receptacles serving micro cabins shall be listed tamper-resistant.

429.3.10.5 At least one interior lighting outlet shall be provided inside each micro cabin sleeping space controlled by a listed wall-mounted control device.

429.3.10.6 At least one lighting outlet shall be installed to provide illumination on the exterior side of egress doors controlled by a listed wall-mounted control device or motion sensing control device. Outdoor lighting shall comply with the Tucson-Pima County Outdoor Lighting Code.

429.3.10.7 Smoke alarms. Smoke alarms complying with NFPA 72 and UL 217 shall be installed inside each micro cabin sleeping space. Smoke alarms shall be interconnected with other smoke alarms in such a manner that the actuation of one alarm will activate all of the alarms in each micro cabin sleeping space located in the same homing campus.

429.3.10.8 Extension cords. The use of extension cords for electrical distribution, lighting, or heating and cooling equipment is prohibited for micro cabins.

429.3.10.9 Appliances. Portable appliances shall not be utilized inside micro cabins including but not limited to hot plates, microwaves, and portable heaters.

429.3.11 Heating and cooling. Micro cabins shall be provided with permanently affixed heating and cooling capable of maintaining an indoor temperature of no less than 68 degrees in the winter and no more than 85 degrees in the summer.

429.3.12 Energy conservation. Micro cabins shall have a maximum energy rating index (ERI) of 57 or meet the prescriptive requirements of the International Energy Conservation Code for residential buildings.

429.3.13 Proximity to fire hydrants. Micro cabins, tents, and mobile sleeping units shall be placed no further than 600 feet in hose lay distance from the nearest fire hydrant.

429.4 Mobile sleeping units and tents. Mobile sleeping units and tents shall comply with the provisions of Sections 429.14.1 through xxx

429.4.1 Address numbers. Mobile sleeping units and tents shall have address numbers painted on the paving in front of spaces reserved for tents or mobile sleeping units. Where mobile sleeping units and tents are not placed on paving, a free-standing address sign shall be provided.

429.4.2 Separation distance. Mobile sleeping units and tents shall be placed no less than 10 feet from other buildings, structures, and sleeping spaces. Exhaust from mobile sleeping units shall be directed away from other mobile sleeping units, buildings, and structures.

903.2.8 Group R. ADD new Exception as follows:

Exception: Group R-5 Micro cabins.