

## FAQ: What Code Applies to Electrical Work?

### Background:

Construction within the City of Philadelphia is regulated by the PA Uniform Construction Code (UCC). The UCC adopts the International Code Council code series, including the International Residential Code, the International Building Code, and the International Existing Building Code with certain modifications.

NFPA 70 (NEC) is a standard referenced in the Residential, Building, and Existing Building Codes for electrical work.

The code describes what must be done and a referenced standard describes how it must be done. A standard is only applicable when explicitly referenced in the code and to the prescribed extent of the reference. Where there is a conflict between the code and a referenced standard, the provisions of the code take precedence.

The relationship between codes and standards can be confusing. This may be compounded for electrical work because of sweeping references to NFPA 70 (NEC) in the codes.

### Answer:

Electrical work is governed by the Building Code, Residential Building Code, and Existing Building Code. NFPA 70 (NEC) is only applied as explicitly referenced in those codes or other adopted codes. Where a conflict exists between the Building Codes and NFPA 70 (NEC), the provisions of the Building Codes govern.

The Building Codes only apply when work is being performed or a building or space is undergoing a change in occupancy classification. The prevailing principles governing existing buildings in the Building Codes are:

1. A building cannot be made less safe by repair or renovation.
2. Repairs may utilize like materials unless an upgrade to current standards is explicitly required by the Building Codes.
3. New work must satisfy the requirements of current standards.
4. Systems, components, and conditions that were legal at the time of installation do not require upgrade unless explicitly required by the Building Codes.

The Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code and the Philadelphia Fire Code (Chapter 11 and additional operations and maintenance requirements referenced in the Code) provide minimum safety requirements that apply to all existing buildings, even when no work is being performed.

Note: Separate requirements may apply to substantial improvement or damage in the special flood hazard area and historic buildings.

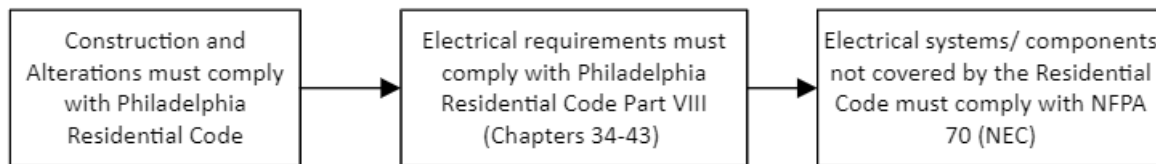
The relationship and applicability of codes is as follows:

### **Residential Buildings- Repairs, Alterations, and New Construction**

For the purpose of this document, a residential building is a detached one- and two-family dwelling or a townhouse not more than three stories in height.

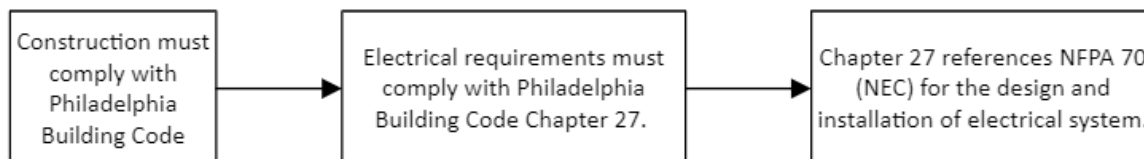
All electrical work relating to a residential building and its accessory structures is governed by Part VIII of the Philadelphia Residential Code. These chapters are produced and copyrighted by NFPA and based on the referenced edition of NFPA 70 (NEC). Any work that is not covered by Part VIII must comply with NFPA 70 (NEC).

An alteration or repair is required to meet the provisions of the Residential Code for new materials; however, the remainder of the building is not required to comply with current standards unless explicitly stated.



### **Non-Residential Buildings- New Construction**

All new work on a building (and accessory structures) that is not classified as residential is governed by the Philadelphia Building Code. Chapter 27 of the Building Code references NFPA 70 (NEC) for the design, construction, and installation of electrical systems, equipment, and components.

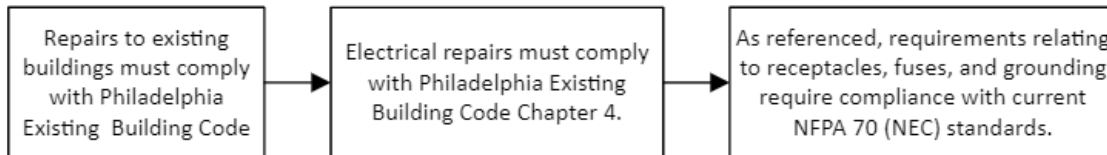


### **Non-Residential Buildings- Repairs, Alterations, Additions, and Change in Occupancy**

The provisions of the Existing Building Code apply to an existing building, as stated in Chapter 27 of the Building Code. New work must comply with the provisions of the Building Code but repairs and required upgrades to buildings undergoing alteration or change in occupancy are governed by the provisions of the Existing Building Code. The Existing Building Code recognizes the challenges associated with upgrading older buildings and takes the intent and extent of work into account.

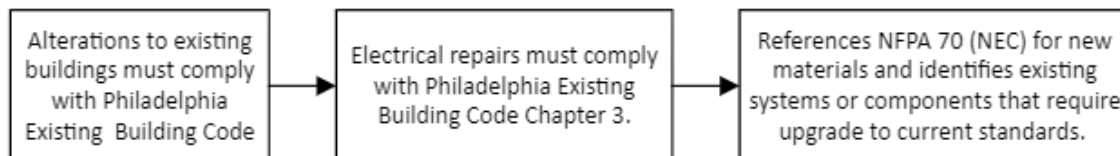
### Repairs

A repair is non-elective work that is necessary to maintain a system in safe condition or to correct damage, which may include the replacement of systems or components. Repairs may be made using like materials unless otherwise stated and the remainder of the building is not required to be upgraded.



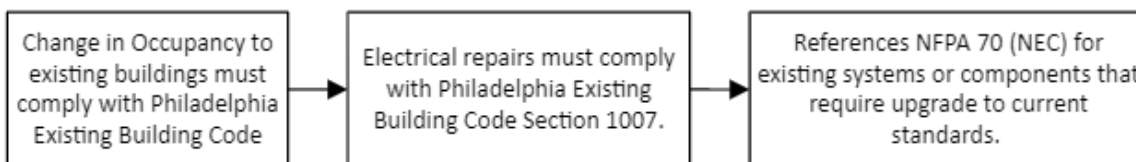
### Alterations

An alteration is any elective renovation that is not classified as a repair. The necessity, and not the extent of work, is the distinguishing factor. Upgrades to the building may be required based on the extent of the work. The Existing Building Code offers multiple paths of compliance and enables the building owner and design professional to select the method that is best suited to their project.



### Change in Occupancy Classification

The Existing Building Code includes requirements for buildings or spaces undergoing a change in occupancy that apply even if no work is proposed.



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**Questions?** Call 311 or (215) 686-8686 (if outside Philadelphia) or submit an online form via <http://www.phila.gov/li/get-help>.

**Disclaimer:** This interpretation, policy or code application is intended to provide guidance to staff for consistency of review and is subject to change without notice. Application of this interpretation, policy or code application to specific projects may vary. There may be other ways to comply with the Code. If so, you are not required to use this method. You may want to investigate other options or consult with a professional identifying an equally code compliant solution.