

# 2021 Virginia Construction Code

## CHAPTER 5 GENERAL BUILDING HEIGHTS AND AREAS

### SECTION 503 GENERAL BUILDING HEIGHT AND AREA LIMITATIONS

#### 503.1 General.

Unless otherwise specifically modified in [Chapter 4](#) and this chapter, *building height*, number of stories and *building area* shall not exceed the limits specified in [Sections 504](#) and [506](#) based on the type of *construction* as determined by [Section 602](#) and the occupancies as determined by [Section 302](#) except as modified hereafter. *Building height*, number of stories and *building area* provisions shall be applied independently. For the purposes of determining area limitations, height limitations and type of construction, each portion of a building separated by one or more *fire walls* complying with [Section 706](#) shall be considered to be a separate building.

#### 503.1.1 Special industrial occupancies.

Buildings and structures designed to house special industrial processes that require large areas and unusual *building heights* to accommodate cranes or special machinery and equipment, including, among others, rolling mills; structural metal fabrication shops and foundries; or the production and distribution of electric, gas or steam power, shall be exempt from the *building height*, number of stories and *building area* limitations specified in [Sections 504](#) and [506](#).

#### 503.1.2 Buildings on same lot.

Two or more buildings on the same lot shall be regulated as separate buildings or shall be considered as portions of one building where the *building height*, number of stories of each building and the aggregate *building area* of the buildings are within the limitations specified in [Sections 504](#) and [506](#). The provisions of this code applicable to the aggregate building shall be applicable to each *building*.

#### 503.1.3 Type I construction.

Buildings of Type I construction permitted to be of unlimited tabular *building heights and areas* are not subject to the special requirements that allow unlimited area buildings in [Section 507](#) or unlimited *building height* in [Sections 503.1.1](#) and [504.3](#) or increased *building heights and areas* for other types of construction.

#### 503.1.4 Occupied roofs.

A roof level or portion thereof shall be permitted to be used as an occupied roof provided the occupancy of the roof is an occupancy that is permitted by [Table 504.4](#) for the *story* immediately below the roof. The area of the occupied roofs shall not be included in the *building area* as regulated by [Section 506](#). An occupied roof shall not be included in the *building height* or number of stories as regulated by [Section 504](#), provided that the *penthouses* and other enclosed *rooftop structures* comply with [Section 1511](#).

#### Exceptions:

1. The occupancy located on an occupied roof shall not be limited to the occupancies allowed on the *story* immediately below the roof where the building is equipped throughout with an *automatic sprinkler system* in accordance with [Section 903.3.1.1](#) or [903.3.1.2](#) and occupant notification in accordance with [Sections 907.5.2.1](#) and [907.5.2.3](#) is provided in the area of the occupied roof. *Emergency voice/alarm communication system notification per Section 907.5.2.2 shall also be provided in the area of the occupied roof where such system is required elsewhere in the building.*
2. Assembly occupancies shall be permitted on roofs of open parking spaces of Type I or Type II construction, in accordance with the exception to [Section 903.2.1.6](#).

#### 503.1.4.1 Enclosures over occupied roof areas.

Elements or structures enclosing the occupied roof areas shall not extend more than 48 inches (1220 mm) above the surface of the occupied roof.

**Exception:** *Penthouses* constructed in accordance with [Section 1511.2](#) and towers, domes, spires and cupolas constructed in accordance with [Section 1511.5](#).