The International Building Code (IBC) classifies buildings and structures “erected or to be erected, altered or extended in height,” into Five (5) construction types. The IBC has attempted to simplify the definitions by deferring to material test performances. The building must meet the minimum requirements of the building type based on the fire-resistive capabilities of the primary materials used. Buildings can have portions exceed minimum requirements and not affect its type. Types are categorized in Roman numerals.

Each type of construction (except for type IV) is broken down into subtypes (e.g. Type I-A or Type I-B) or fire-resistance ratings within the type. Three sets of variables will govern the analysis of the building: intended occupancy, height and building area. For example, the higher occupancy rating of a building will require additional active and/or passive fire suppression systems in relation to another building with lower occupancy demands. The primary difference between these subcategories is the hourly fire-resistance ratings for structural frames and bearing walls.

**TYPE I & II:**
The main elements or systems of construction are labeled “noncombustible: meet the test criteria prescribed in the ASTM E136.” Examples of these materials would be masonry, concrete and steel. Combustible materials within the systems of the building are permitted under section 603 of the IBC, such as thermal insulation or interior floor finishes. To simplify, primary subtype differences are for structural frame and bearing wall fire ratings: Hourly Fire-Resistance Ratings

- I-A: 3 hours
- I-B: 2 hours
- II-A: 1 hour
- II-B: No hourly rating required

Types III, IV and V are considered combustible.

Although there is no definition in the IBC for combustible construction, main elements of construction are allowed in varying degrees to be combustible or not complying with ASTM E136.

**TYPE III:**
A combination of systems usually comprised of exterior walls of noncombustible materials and the interior building elements are of any material permitted by the IBC. Fire retardant-treated wood is acceptable in exterior walls that comply with section 2303.2 of the IBC with at least a 2-hour fire rating. Subtypes with varying degrees of hourly fire-ratings are listed in Table 601 of the IBC.

**TYPE IV:**
Known as heavy timber or mill construction in which the exterior walls are of noncombustible materials. Interior building elements utilize wood structural members and heavy wood decking. Building elements do not contain concealed spaces and contain systems that prevent a fire from the exterior into unprotected openings.

**TYPE V:**
The least restrictive construction type permits exterior and interior walls to be comprised of any materials permitted by the IBC. A typical example of this building type is a wood-framed single family residence.

- Type V-A: Protected construction, all major building elements must have at least a 1-hour fire-resistance rating. Exception: non-load bearing interior walls and partitions have no rating.
- Type V-B: No fire-resistance ratings are required except for exterior fire separation distance listed in Table 602 of the IBC.

Please note: This page is intended as a summary, refer to Chapter 6 of the IBC for more concise information. Always check with local building departments that can make changes or alterations to building type classifications within their jurisdiction.