Prevention is better than cure

Don’t touch me if you are not qualified!

Building defects, especially those on the external building fabrics (such as external walls), may cause serious or fatal accidents! Most of these defects can be identified at an early stage through symptoms detectable by professional inspection. If these symptoms are not timely detected and properly dealt with, parts of external building elements may suddenly fall off endangering lives of the public. Moreover, the costs involved in repairing such defects would be increased substantially.

Timely maintenance of buildings not only improves the quality of living environment, but also enhances the property value. Furthermore, the mandatory building inspection scheme (MBIS) has commenced operation since 30 June 2012. Buildings aged 30 years or above are subject to the MBIS. Owners who fail to comply with the MBIS requirements will be held legally liable if loose parts fall from external building elements, and should take steps to rectify the defects promptly so as to prevent any danger and damage to life and property. If signs of spallation are found on the external walls of your building, you should immediately contact the management company or the owners’ corporation (OC), and all other owners where there is no OC, to arrange for thorough inspections and necessary repairs by qualified building professionals.

Building owners should keep watch on the conditions of the external walls, in particular, whether the concrete structure or the external finishing on the external wall has shown signs of instability such as cracks, spalling, bulging and loose pieces, and should take steps to rectify the defects promptly so as to prevent any danger and damage to life and property. If signs of spallation are found on the external walls of your building, you should immediately contact the management company or the owners’ corporation (OC), and all other owners where there is no OC, to arrange for thorough inspections and necessary repairs by qualified building professionals.

You should then convene a general meeting of owners to discuss and decide on the following matters:

1. Qualification of building professionals and contractors
   - Owner should appoint qualified building professionals and contractors as soon as possible.
   - Qualified building professionals, including authorized persons (AP) or registered inspectors where applicable, and registered structural engineers as may be required, should be appointed to carry out thorough investigation, advise on necessary maintenance and repair works including repair methods and procedures, selection of building materials, formulation of safety measures, and the necessary safety measures.
   - Qualified contractors should be appointed to carry out the works under the supervision of an AP.
   - Qualified contractors are the parties to execute the works. For most of the cases, maintenance and repair works of buildings involve minor works which are subject to the “Minor Works Control System”. Registered General Building Contractor (RGBC) or Registered Minor Works Contractor qualified to carry out the works should be appointed to execute the works. In carrying out the works which require prior approval of plans and consent to the commencement of works from the Building Authority (Buildings Department, RGBC must be appointed to execute the works required for the supervision of an AP.
   - The lists of qualified building professionals and registered contractors and their telephone numbers are available at Buildings Department’s website (http://www.bd.gov.hk) for reference by the public.

2. Owners’ responsibility and liability
   - Like any other parts of a building, the responsibility for repair and maintenance of the external walls and other elements lies with the owners of the building. The owners may also be held legally liable if parts or external building elements fall off endangering lives of the public, occupants and the workers.
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