
HOW TO LOOK OUT FOR A BALCONY COLLAPSE



A recent balcony collapse where people were severely injured

It's critical to ascertain whether your balcony was built properly. One way is by checking council records for proof of building approval. Another way is by having it checked out by a structural engineer or a specially-trained architect. The following tips may also be useful:

Timber Balconies

- 1) Identify the species of timber. Oregon may not be appropriate for external structures. It is distinguishable by a broad softwood grain pattern and by a pinkish colour when fresh surfaces are exposed, like during a split, for instance.
- 2) Observe for any compression or deformation of the structural members.
- 3) Test the timber by probing with a sharp object like a screwdriver. Decayed timber may feel soft and spongy.
- 4) Gain access underneath using a ladder. Check connection points at the beams with a screwdriver for deterioration. Timber generally rots where two pieces of timber join together. Examine brackets and bolts to make sure they are not rusted.
- 5) Make sure the timber balcony is properly fixed to the house or that the members run into the house.
- 6) Check base of timber posts for rot and again check brackets and bolts for signs of rust.

- 7) Posts need to be securely anchored into the ground and not just bolted into the paving.
- 8) Check handrails and vertical balustrade to make sure they are not rotted and unstable.



Rotting timber from a balcony collapse

Concrete Balconies

- 1) Look for signs of deflection. If the balcony leans, there is a problem.
- 2) Examine the underside of the concrete balcony. Rust stains on exposed steel reinforcing are signs of a serious problem.
- 3) Check handrails and balustrades to make sure they are not rotted, loose or unstable.
- 4) The presence of spalling, where chunks of concrete are flaking off, may be a serious problem and needs to be inspected by an expert.



The third floor balcony sheared off the Manly apartment building crashing through the balcony below to the public area at ground level
Image courtesy of ACRA

If there is anything suspicious about a balcony's stability, Archicentre advises to avoid the area until an architect is able to determine the full scale of the problem. Contact Archicentre at 1300 13 45 13 to arrange an Architect's Advice Report.