



We've weathered the snow, but have our buildings? Spring is near-get ready for the spring thaw!

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With the heavy amount of snowfall this winter, there's no doubt our buildings took a hit. And while winter is nearing an end for us New Yorkers, our buildings still must endure the spring thaw-a process that causes extensive wear and tear on exterior components such as roofs, façades, retaining walls, sidewalks and plazas.

As building owners and property managers endeavor to ensure the overall safety and structural integrity of their buildings, it is critical that they are also proficient in the ever-changing requirements of the buildings department and insurance providers that affect their building envelopes.

Façades

Winter conditions and freeze-thaw cycles can exact a heavy toll on the façades of buildings, which can lead to the development of cracks and bulges in the exterior masonry, deterioration of mortar joints, and splitting of caulked joints. One way in which the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) has worked to ensure public safety and protect against damage to property from unsafe façade conditions is through the enforcement of Local Law 11 of 1998.

Local Law 11/98 requires that the exterior façades of buildings greater than six stories be inspected every five years by a qualified exterior wall inspector (QEWI), and that the conditions noted during the inspection be categorized as safe, unsafe, or Safe with a Repair & Maintenance Program (SWARMP). Unsafe conditions must be repaired immediately, and conditions that are Safe with a Repair & Maintenance Program must be corrected within the time frame recommended by the professional, but no later than the deadline for the next inspection and report filing.

Starting with Cycle 7, which is the current cycle of Local Law 11/98, the DOB divided the required façade inspections into three staggered sub-cycles (A, B and C). The assignment of a particular building to one of the sub-cycles is based upon the last digit of the building's block number. The first two sub-cycles, A and B, are already underway, with sub-cycle B having begun February 21. Sub-cycle C will commence February 21, 2012.

Retaining Walls

Following the collapse of a retaining wall at the site of Castle Village onto the Henry Hudson Pwy., Local Law 37 of 2008 was enacted by the New York City Council, establishing new inspection and reporting requirements for retaining walls that are 10 ft. or more in height and front a public right-of-way.

Condition assessments must be performed at least once every five years by a professional engineer or registered architect, and a report of the condition assessment submitted to the buildings department within 60 days of the assessment.

It is crucial that building owners and property managers have a registered design professional inspect their retaining walls following the spring thaw to check for any damage and specify any

required repairs.

Sidewalks & Plazas

One of the new challenges facing building owners, both commercial and residential, is the changing requirements of their insurance providers. Insurance providers are now conducting inspections of building sidewalks, courtyards and parking lots to check for conditions that could present possible trip hazards. If such conditions are noted, they must be corrected within an allotted time frame. Insurance providers are now requesting that building owners retain an engineer to assess the conditions and prepare the necessary documents to remedy trip hazards.

Roofs

It is important for building owners and property managers to have their roofing systems inspected by a qualified professional to identify any potential weaknesses before the heavy spring rains begin to fall. With the use of infrared thermographic technology and other non-destructive techniques, engineering professionals can detect problem areas before water and moisture cause extensive damage. By being proactive, building owners and property managers can protect themselves against emergencies, unnecessary expenses, and even voided warranties.

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