



Local Law 11 is not a façade - by Gabriella Schwalbe

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The scaffolding that surrounds your current office or apartment building seems like an everlasting nuisance. New Yorkers are fed up with the amount of time scaffolding stays up. Some buildings have been plagued by scaffolding for over a decade. New York City Council members have recently introduced legislation to speed up façade work as well as reduce the timeline for scaffolding. Although the plague of scaffolding seems burdensome, the scaffolding that covers our city buildings can be lifesaving.

In 1979 Grace Gold, a freshman student at Barnard College, was killed by a loose piece of masonry that fell from a Columbia University owned building on Broadway and 115th St. Shortly after her tragic death, Local Law 10 was passed. The law required the quinquennial inspection of the street facing façade of buildings greater than six stories. In 1998 the law was amended to Local Law 11 requiring all exposures to be inspected. Incidents of serious injury and death occur all too often because building owners do not maintain their façade walls and keep up with inspections. In May 2015 two-year-old Greta Green was killed by a piece of decorative terra-cotta windowsill that fell eight stories. Greta's death could have been prevented but for a licensed engineer's falsified safety form. Recently in December of 2019 Erica Tishman, a prominent architect in Manhattan, was struck by building debris in Time Sq. and passed away. In this case the fatal accident could have been avoided if a sidewalk shed was erected after a DOB inspection that noted façade cracks.

Approximately 12,500 buildings in NYC are subject to Local Law 11. Inspection reports are due every five years on February 21, at 11:59 pm. The year a building is required to undergo a critical examination is based on the building's block number. This year's filing included properties that are located on a block number that ends with 4, 5, 6, or 9. As of February 20, 2020, the Department of Buildings has tightened Local Law 11. Changes include the requirement that Qualified Exterior Wall Inspectors (QEWI) have a higher level of experience and perform more hands-on inspections. Building owners are now subject to higher penalties if they fail to make required repairs. Also, owners must post the status of façade inspection in the lobby of their building. It is important that building owners keep up with building façade inspections because a small crack may not look like much, but the repair can be lifesaving.

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