



Spring is an ideal time to access your building for leaks and Local Law 11 of 1998 compliance

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The adage that April showers bring May flowers may lift our spirits. However, with days of heavy rain compounded by the freeze thaw effects of a frigid winter; undoubtedly along with the flowers, you will be notified of many building leaks by tenants or shareholders.

The effects of water infiltration can be devastating to a building's structural integrity. Leaks are the most elusive of all façade problems. A complaint of an active leak is often far removed from the initial point of entry. Water may be entering in one line of the building and cracked, peeling or bee-hiving of paint is noted elsewhere. A quick fix of plaster and paint may mollify for a time but resolves no more than repeat repairs.

Strong wind and rain can dislodge the mortar and caulking of joints, sills and lintels. Winter snow drifts may have compromised the flashing system allowing water to seep beneath the structural deck. Terraces may have cracked or loose tiles from water ponding and then freezing. Chimneys which have worked overtime throughout winter may have shifting cap stones or cracks. And, if your roof wasn't in good shape prior, those fissures, distended seams and bulges are far more evident, along with the hidden moisture underneath.

Exterior repairs and re-roofing can involve months of work at a hefty price tag. In this economy many buildings are shelving large-scale projects until required by law. According to the Department of Buildings website, "Local Law 11 of 1998 mandates the periodic inspection of the exterior walls and appurtenances of buildings greater than six stories in height."

John Flynn of John Flynn Engineers informed me that the new cycle of inspections is to begin February 2010. When asked what changes are expected, Flynn said, "The new cycle of inspections will be staggered by building block numbers over a period of years (2010-2013) allowing for less confusion in the volume of filings and availing qualified contractors to manage the substantial work load."

This is a good plan, but what about the buildings whose block numbers will fall at the end of the next cycle? Or, those who filed for SWARMP (Safe with a Repair and Maintenance Program) during the previous LL11-98 cycle? If ongoing maintenance practices aren't put into place now, these buildings inevitably will need much larger scopes of work specified by their engineer or architect for filing and compliancy.

What can a building do in lean times? First, your structural engineer or valued contractor should be kept informed of building conditions. Secondly, documentation is of utmost importance including a building-wide leak survey. This will not only furnish a comprehensive overview to your building's structural health, it will provide shareholders or tenants with a perception of due diligence. Periodically updating this survey will prevent unnecessary work performed in the same locations. Documentation also helps resolve a dispute over what was or wasn't performed by the contractor.

Furthermore, reminding the occupant that work to resolve their leak was completed, though their ceiling or wall still needs time to dry out. A moisture meter is good for that.

Spring is an ideal time for visual inspection of your building with field binoculars. Your engineer, exterior contractor or resident manager can spot bulging masonry, larger cracks and open mortar joints. Which if repaired now, will be far less costly than having conditions worsen over time. Checking that window air conditioners are properly pitched, unclogging roof and terrace drains and repositioning uplifted flashings are simple, yet effective preventive maintenance.

Remedial repairs can be made to the roof as well. Barry Grummer, president of KR&R said, "Patching areas most susceptible to water infiltration with a reputable roofing product or applying liquid flashing cement to areas of culpability, including pitch pockets, drains or skylights should provide an interim repair of a year or more."

With more rain throughout this spring there will be more leaks occurring. Addressing preventive maintenance issues now can save your building not only money down the line and into your next LL 10-98 cycle, but also the headache of recurring complaints.

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