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Attention building owners and managers: Façade inspections are more important now than ever

September 22, 2009 - Spotlights

In light of the recent cornice/parapet wall collapse at Northeastern University this summer (which fortunately did not hurt any passers-by), it may be time to consider why a regular façade inspection should be an important part of every facility budget.

In 1995, the city of Boston issued an ordinance which mandated that every building over 70' in height was required to be inspected and then certified as compliant by a licensed architect or registered engineer, once every 5 years. If a building is less than 125' in height a visual inspection can be conducted via binoculars or utilizing adjacent buildings as a viewpoint, while a structure over 125' in height would require an up close inspection via lift, staging, etc., one drop per elevation of the building. Violation of this ordinance carries a \$100 per day penalty if assessed.

It is obvious as to the reasoning behind the ordinance being a safety issue to prevent deteriorated façade components and appurtenances from falling off the buildings to the ground and potentially damaging property and, worse yet, injuring or killing someone.

Building owners and managers can obviously see the need to avoid this unfortunate and tragic event from happening both from a compassionate human and social consciousness view to a professional liability and business view. Regardless if the structure falls inside the property lines of the city of Boston, if a building of any significant height has a cornice, ledge, parapet wall or other appurtenance that is part of the overall building façade, left alone to the exposure and abuse from Mother Nature here in New England, eventually that component will experience some form of deterioration and then water infiltration. Simply waiting for leaks to appear in the occupied areas of a building is not enough as water infiltration may not manifest itself inside immediately, thus rendering an unknown condition to continue to deteriorate and spread until freeze/thaw cycles take their toll and the component is separated from the structure and sent to the ground below.

The benefits of regular façade inspections include:

- * Identifying and documenting the current condition of building envelope components;
- * Determining the need for repair or remediation of building components.
- * Avoiding potentially tragic accidents and costly liability;
- * Identifying potential future expenses that may be required as a budget-forecasting tool.

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