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Balcony Collapse Injury Prompts Warning



Archicentre, the building advisory service of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects today issued a red alert warning on timber balcony collapses following another collapse of a balcony in Fitzroy which saw two people taken to hospital.

Thousands of people gather to celebrate on balconies in large groups at family or social gatherings every day and especially on weekends.

Mr Robert Caulfield, Managing Director of Archicentre said that Archicentre's pre-purchase inspection statistics have revealed an alarming number of rotting balconies that could cause severe injury or death from a collapse, particularly when they are heavily loaded at parties.

Archicentre's statistics show that approximately 6% of Australian homes have a timber balcony or deck and that about 2% of these were potentially fatal. This figure indicates that there could be as many as 8,000 of these dangerous balconies or decks throughout Australia.

Mr Caulfield said that the most dangerous group of houses were those built between 1970 and 1990 when decks became prevalent and there was widespread use of inappropriate timber, balconies built without building approval, inadequate structural

design and poor workmanship.

In the last few years, balcony collapses in several states have resulted in a number of injuries and deaths. Archicentre warns that more could follow.

The potential legal and financial implications for the home owners would be enormous.

As a safety measure, he recommends that all homeowners should carefully check the support beams and posts looking for soft, spongy sections of compressed timber. If doubts still linger, its best to arrange a professional inspection.

"Home owners and commercial property owners with balconies constructed with timber beams should conduct a close inspection of their structures to ensure safety. The safety of elevated timber decks should be a primary concern of any homeowner."

All exterior timbers are susceptible to insect attack and decay. With only pressure treated pine resistant to deterioration for an extended period of time. Wet-rot is a particular danger. A properly applied stain or paint finish will restrict water entry through the faces of timber members, but gaps and joints and exposed end-grain provide a ready place for moisture to penetrate.

"We believe there is also a need for a national awareness campaign through local government building departments to make people aware of the issues, especially in seaside areas."

Mr Caulfield says that most properly built and well maintained balconies should last for 50 years.

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