

INVESTING & WEALTH REAL ESTATE

Facade inspections for ageing buildings soon a must: BCA

Agency expects over 4,000 structures to be inspected each year; new requirements for lifts and escalators to be introduced

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IN VIEW of Singapore's ageing building stock, facade inspections will soon need to be conducted every seven years for buildings that are more than 13 metres tall, once they are over 20 years old.

This was one of the amendments made to the Building Control Act passed in Parliament on Friday.

Other changes include an enhanced regulatory framework for lifts and escalators, and a government mandate for a progressive wage model (PWM) for Singapore residents in the lift maintenance industry.

There are also requirements of basic accessibility features for older buildings that undergo addition and alteration (A&A) works, to improve accessibility for the aged and persons with disabilities.

Under the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act, building owners must ensure that building exteriors are properly maintained.

There have been cases of facade parts dislodged due to weather elements and natural deterioration over time.

As such, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) will introduce a new regime to facilitate the early detection of facade deterioration and allow defects to be rectified in a timely way.

This will help reduce the likelihood of facade failure as Singapore's building stock ages, it said. Landed houses are exempted from these requirements.

Responsible parties must appoint a professional engineer or registered architect, who can be assisted by a facade inspector.

The engineer or architect will then propose appropriate rectification works, if deterioration is detected. These works must be carried out within a specified period.

BCA expects more than 4,000 buildings to be inspected each year.

About two-fifths of the buildings to be inspected in the first seven-year cycle are private residential, industrial and commercial buildings, while the remainder comprise HDB flats and public as well as government buildings.

BCA will also introduce inspection guidelines and strengthen R&D efforts to look into more effective and productive ways to carry out facade inspections, such as by using drones and borescopes, which are small flexible cameras.

As for the other Act amendments, to accelerate accessibility upgrading in older buildings, BCA will require buildings without basic accessibility features to provide these when undertaking A&A works that require plan submissions.

Such features include an accessible building entrance, an accessible route within the entrance level and an accessible toilet.

The new requirement will apply to commercial and institutional buildings (such as community centres and religious buildings) with gross floor area of more than 500 square metres.

In addition, BCA will introduce new requirements for the design and installation of lifts and escalators to reduce the likelihood of deficiencies which may give rise to downstream safety incidents.

With this, owners of lifts and escalators will need to engage the services of specialist professional engineers to certify the design plans of lifts and escalators, which are to be submitted to BCA for approval.

The government has also accepted the Lift and Escalator Sectoral Tripartite Committee's recommendations and targets to mandate the PWM for the lift industry in 2022.

Since 2019, the government has supported the PWM by only awarding lift maintenance tenders to firms that have adopted the model.

To date, 40 lift maintenance contractors, representing 95 per cent of the market share in Singapore, have committed to adopt the model.

BCA added that the industry will be given enough notice ahead of the implementation of the new requirements, which will take place progressively from the second half of 2021, when the necessary regulations have been put in place.

Speaking in Parliament, Minister of State for National Development Zaqq Mohamad said that Singapore has developed rapidly over the past 55 years and there is a need to ensure that its building infrastructure remains well-maintained and safe.

"This is particularly important for older buildings. Today, about 70 per cent of our building stock is more than 20 years old. In addition, our buildings, both old and new, will need to be made more accessible to meet the needs of an ageing population, as well as persons with disabilities," he added.