

**For discussion
on 13 July 2005**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON PLANNING, LANDS AND WORKS**

Safety of Aluminium Windows of Buildings

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides information on the measures taken by the Government to ensure the safety of aluminium windows in both private buildings and public rental housing.

PROBLEM

2. The Government is concerned about the recent spate of aluminium window failures. In most cases, the window falling incidents are mainly due to a lack of regular inspection and proper maintenance, and improper use of windows. Without timely inspection, building owners may not be able to identify window defects, such as corrosion of the fixing rivets or the loosening of screws of the window frames and sashes, for proper repair and maintenance. Having regard to the seriousness of the problem and its significant impact on public safety, the Government has stepped up efforts to remedy the situation.

PRIVATE BUILDINGS

Enhancing public awareness of importance of regular inspection and maintenance of windows

3. To ensure window safety, both proper design and installation of windows, as well as regular inspection and maintenance are important. On the design and installation aspect, BD has promulgated technical guidelines in the form of practice notes to building professionals and registered contractors. These practice notes were updated regularly, with the latest revision issued in March 2005.

4. On the other hand, building owners and occupiers have the responsibility to carry out regular checks and timely maintenance for the windows in their premises. Lack of proper maintenance may result in the failure of windows, posing a threat to the safety of the public. In this connection, to minimise the occurrence of similar incidents in the future, it is important for building owners to regularly inspect the conditions of their windows and keep them under good maintenance.

5. The Government has stepped up the following efforts to enhance public awareness of the importance of regular inspection and maintenance of windows and render the necessary advice and help where appropriate:

- (a) BD has extended its hotline service to provide advice to the public on a 24-hour basis on issues relating to the maintenance of windows;
- (b) BD has issued letters to over 1.3 million private households drawing attention to the need for regular inspection with specific advice on what to look out for in respect of window maintenance;
- (c) BD officers had attended a number of radio programmes to enhance the public awareness of the safety of aluminium windows, emphasizing the importance of regular checks by owners and in avoiding misuse of the windows, e.g. for hanging laundry;
- (d) BD will issue a new pamphlet on inspection and maintenance of aluminium windows to all private households around mid-July 2005;
- (e) BD has increased the frequency and prime time showing of API on TV and radio for disseminating the message on window inspection and maintenance to the public; and
- (f) BD and Home Affairs Department (HAD) have organised a series of seminars on window inspection and maintenance in each of the 18 districts for the chairman of owners' corporations (OCs) and mutual and committees (MACs), property managers as well as the public starting late June 2005. Representatives from the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) and Hong Kong Facade Association are invited to the seminars to offer their advice and services. Regional seminars will also be held at HAD's four Building Management Resource Centres in July/August 2005 to disseminate useful

information to the public.

Facilitating owners to inspect windows

6. To assist building owners, in particular those who may not be sure on how to go about the inspection process, we have also enlisted the help of non-government bodies in providing the following services:

- (a) through BD's appeal, the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies (Ltd) and building management companies have organized contractors to check the windows at the buildings/premises under their management;
- (b) for buildings with OCs or MACs, BD and HAD are encouraging the chairmen of these organizations to arrange contractors to check the windows at their buildings/premises. District seminars are one of the channels to do so; and
- (c) HKHS is providing a free aluminium window inspection service for private buildings, including those without OCs or MACs. They will accord priority to residential buildings over 20 years of age and falling within the specified ratable values stipulated under the Society's "Building Management and Maintenance Scheme".

Strengthening enforcement

7. BD will issue repair orders against any owners who fail to carry out any necessary repairs for any defective windows identified by the inspections referred to in paragraph 6. In this connection, BD's 24-hour hotline service (mentioned in para. 5(a) above) also enables the public to promptly report to BD on dilapidated window cases or seek advice on issues relating to the maintenance of aluminium windows. From 1 January to 30 June 2005, BD has received 35 emergency reports relating to failure of aluminium windows and BD has taken immediate actions to deal with the problems.

8. To strengthen the control of window alteration and installation works, we will designate the installation and alteration of windows as minor works in the Buildings (Amendment) Bill to be presented to LegCo in the coming legislative session.

Devising long-term measures

9. As a long term measure, we will explore the feasibility of adopting a mandatory approach to require building owners to inspect their windows regularly and carry out necessary maintenance work. We intend to consult the public as part of the second stage consultation on building management and maintenance to be launched towards the end of the year. We will introduce a detailed manual for contractors and workers engaged in the installation and maintenance of aluminium windows.

PUBLIC RENTAL HOUSING

Existing measures to ensure window safety

10. The Housing Department (HD) attaches great importance to ensuring the safety of aluminium windows in public housing estates and is concerned about the recent window falling incidents. Currently, out of some 680 000 flats in 160 public rental housing estates, about 272 000 flats or 40% are installed with aluminium windows. Installation of these windows complies with the requirements of the BD's guidelines applicable at the time of installation.

11. Estate management staff, through daily patrol, inspect and repair when necessary the aluminum windows in the common areas of the housing estates. To enhance tenants' awareness of the importance of proper window maintenance, HD distributes guidelines to tenants and displays annotated photographs in the lift lobby of each domestic block to facilitate tenants' window checks. HD will also carry out prompt inspection and necessary repairs in response to tenants' reports concerning defective or malfunctioning windows.

Three-pronged approach to ensure safety of aluminium windows

12. In view of the recent spate of incidents, HD has stepped up efforts to strengthen the existing regime for inspecting and maintaining aluminium windows in public housing estates by adopting a three-pronged approach as follows:

- (a) *proactive inspection programme*: to step up inspection and ensure prompt repair works, HD has set up 20 teams of designated staff to

proactively check and repair in-flat aluminium windows of all public rental housing estates, with priority given to Harmony-type blocks built before 2000 and those blocks with records of loose or fallen windows. Follow-up actions to repair the malfunctioning windows will be taken within 48 hours upon identification of defects during inspection or receipt of tenants' report;

- (b) *adding screw to the windows*: before 2000, the aluminium windows installed in public housing flats had two screws. There are 140 000 flats in 213 Harmony-type blocks in 53 public housing estates installed with aluminium windows with two screws. To strive for continuous enhancement in the safety of aluminium windows, the HD will carry out works to add an additional screw to the in-flat windows to reinforce the bars of the hinge of the window frame and the openable sash. The addition works, which have already started, will take about nine months to complete. The works will require a total cost of \$68 million; and
- (c) *sustaining education and publicity efforts*: regular inspection facilitates early identification of aluminium window defects. To heighten tenants' awareness of window safety, the HD will continue with publicity efforts through guidelines, estate newsletter and the Housing TV Channel to educate tenants on the proper use and maintenance of aluminium windows.