



Glass used in Balcony Guards

In the summer of 2011, there was considerable media attention focused on “falling glass” from breakage of the glass panels used as guards on several condominium buildings in Toronto.

In each reported instance, it was tempered glass that broke, with fragments falling into neighbouring streets. One individual was reported injured by falling pieces. Sidewalks were cordoned off and the developers arranged to replace the guards. Extensive reports as to cause and appropriate repairs were commissioned. A prime suspect in most instances was the presence of Nickel Sulphide inclusions in the tempered glass panels.

The City of Toronto and the Residential Construction Council of Ontario asked the province to review and amend the Ontario Building Code to help reduce the likelihood of more glass falling from newly constructed buildings.

In response, the Building Code Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing convened an Expert Panel on Glass Panels in Balcony Guards. The Panel’s mandate was to recommend whether and how the OBC might be amended to address the problem and the risk to persons stemming from such breakage.

A set of seven recommendations was sent to the Ministry for consideration and the province enacted Supplementary Standard SB-13, Glass in Guards, June 12, 2012 which came into effect on July 1, 2012.

As the Panel was completing its recommendations, a number of “Class Action” lawsuits were filed related to some of the affected buildings based on the loss of use of the balconies by the unit owners.

It is understood that the province intends the Supplementary Standard to be an interim measure, pending development of a new CSA Standard suitable for reference in the NBC, OBC, and other provincial and territorial building codes.

In the interim, architects considering the use of safety glass in balcony guards or balustrades, should familiarize themselves with the new code provisions that now apply in Ontario.

Supplementary Standard SB-13, Glass in Guards, June 12, 2012 can be accessed on the Ontario Building Code website: www.mah.gov.on.ca/Asset9717.aspx?method.1

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