

Self survey of your building

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Byelaw no. 156 of the Cooperative Housing Societies (CHS) states that "It shall be the responsibility of the Managing Committee to maintain the property of the Society in good condition at all times". It is, therefore, important that the committee members keep track of the condition of the building regularly. Further, Byelaw no. 157 requires that "the Secretary, on receipt of any complaints from any members about maintenance of the property, or on his own motion, shall inspect the property of the Society from time to time and make a report to the Committee, stating the need of repairs, if any, considered necessary". Such an inspection may be called "Self Survey".

Let us understand the basic aspects of Self Survey.

When to survey?

The byelaws say nothing about when and how often such inspections should be carried out. Nevertheless, it is advisable that they should be carried out at least once a year, preferably after the first month of monsoon (say in July). An additional inspection sometime in March is also recommended especially for the building faces and common areas. A critical situation may also warrant an urgent inspection.

How to survey?

The intended mode of such an inspection is visual. The Secretary should go around in the building and flats and note down the distress/ deficiencies he observes. He may also take photographs of important observations. The Secretary may not have a technical background or experience. Therefore, if another member with some technical knowledge or experience accompanies him, the quality of inspection may be better. Before visiting the flats, the Committee may distribute a questionnaire and collect feedback from the members.

Where to survey?

Experience suggests that the following areas exhibit more distress than others and their condition can be treated as a barometer for the building's health. Therefore they should be inspected more carefully.

External/ Common areas:

- Terrace
- Staircase cabin
- Lift room, pump room
- West and south sides
- Walls without windows
- External side of staircase
- Chowks and ducts
- Water tanks
- Porch, chajjas, balconies
- Stilts/ parking area

Apartments:

- Top floor apartments
- Ground floor apartments
- Toilets, lofts, kitchen

What to look for?

Depending on the part being inspected, you should look for the following distress:

RCC: Cracks, bulges, corrosion, sagging, dampness

Walls: Cracks, seepage, sinking, loss of plaster, fungus

Tiles: Cracks, hollowness, looseness

Other: Leaking pipes, overloading, alterations, termites, rodents, absence of chajjas, weathered painting, paving

Limitations:

The self survey is preliminary and can only establish the need for repair of the building so that a repair consultant can be hired. It cannot substitute for a professional survey/ structural audit and should not be treated as adequate for carrying out repair work.

Beyond the byelaws:

While the byelaw talks about inspection by the Secretary, it also provides for “complaints from the members about maintenance”. Therefore, the individual members of the CHS can also apply the above-mentioned criteria to their flats and common areas and send their observations to the managing committee. After all it is through such concern and participation only that you can maintain your building better.

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