

Watch Points for Flats & Buildings

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Performance of our homes and buildings depends on how well we maintain them. A sign of deterioration (crack, corrosion, dampness etc) observed in a flat or in a building is called a "distress". If we are watchful, we can take necessary action on such distresses before they become worse. Today let us see some commonly encountered types of distress so that you can understand them when you come across them in your flat or your building.

Concrete & RCC

These are predominantly the structural components of the building such as columns, beams and slabs. Any distress observed in such components may indicate loss of strength and durability of the building structure and, therefore, call for "Structural Repair". This is a common checklist in this category:

- Cracks/ hollowness/ dampness in concrete
- Spalling (local internal separation of concrete)
- Falling of cover concrete (surface layer)
- Corrosion of bars
- Thinned/ broken bars
- Deflection/ sagging of beam and slab
- Sinking of column

Walls & Plaster

Distress caused by seepage primarily spreads through walls. Watchful occupants can easily locate many from the following list of distress:

- Dampness or seepage
- Salty deposits/ efflorescence
- Fungus/ plants growing on wall
- Holes in walls
- Termites
- Separation cracks found at the junction of RCC and wall
- Diagonal (inclined) cracks near the junction of column & beam
- Hollow/ loose plaster
- Local absence of plaster
- Disintegration of mortar between bricks/ blocks
- Sinking of walls on ground floor

Doors & Windows

The checklist in this category commonly covers the following:

- Decay/ cracks and disintegration
- Termites
- Distortion of door/ window frame
- Absence of chajja for window
- Cranky movement of sliding windows

Flooring, Skirting, Dado

This is a common list in this category:

- Cracks in tiles
- Looseness/ heaving of tiles
- Growth of fungus
- Rough surface (excessive scrubbing)
- Seepage through flooring joints
- Sinking of flooring on ground floor

Plumbing & Drainage

Distress in plumbing and drainage is closely related to the sources of seepage of water. Watchful occupants can easily locate many of the observations in the following list:

- Cracks/ loss of joints in the pipes causing leaks
- Broken/ absence of rainwater pipes
- Absence of vent pipes for toilets
- Pipes running too close to walls & accumulating littance
- Backflow from kitchen/ toilet
- Corroded water supply pipes
- Broken/ uncovered chambers

Toilets & Kitchen

Seepage through a toilet or kitchen above can be very annoying. Nevertheless, it is pretty common too. Many of the points mentioned above apply to this category also. Additionally, the following points may also be noted:

- Leaking flush tank
- Rotting of door frame
- Exposure of tile joints
- Improper sealing of fixtures
- Distress in RCC loft

Terrace Waterproofing

Bad quality of the terrace waterproofing system can cause considerable agony for the occupants of the top floor, year after year. Once seepage from terrace starts, it progressively becomes worse and locating the source of seepage can be extremely difficult. In fact the sources may be many. Local treatment may not prove to be effective and complete re-waterproofing is expensive. Members should, therefore, look for the early signs of the following points and take an early action on them:

- Cracks on surface associated with hollowness
- Excessive roughness of surface
- Inadequate surface slope
- Obstructions to flow of rainwater
- Cracks/ holes/ blocks at the mouth of rainwater pipe
- Pipes running too close to parapet walls & accumulating littance
- Too few rainwater pipes for a zigzag shaped terrace
- Improper watta/ drip mould at the junction of slab & walls
- No protective cover on the parapet wall
- Water tank directly touching the slab.

Miscellaneous

Some of the other watch points are as follows:

- Leaking water tanks
- Sagging lift room slabs
- No paving or rough/ cracked paving
- Cracked/ tilted compound wall
- Broken RCC jail for staircase
- Corroded electrical conduits
- Non-functional fire fighting system
- Rodents (rats) in premises

Applications

You can apply these watch points to the external and common areas (building faces, stilts, staircase, terrace etc) as well as to apartments. In some cases you can even identify the cause of distress by proper correlation of your observations. Observations

concerning structural distress and distress in the common areas should be brought to the notice of the Managing Committee of your Co-op. Housing Society and action on other observations should be taken by the members themselves.

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