

Toronto councillor calls for probe into falling glass

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A downtown Toronto city councillor is calling for an investigation into incidents of falling glass around the city as a prominent condominium developer announced it would replace the balcony glass on three of its buildings.

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam says it's time to examine the type of glass used in condo buildings, after several recent cases of glass falling to the ground.



VIDEO

Video: Shards of glass rain down in downtown Toronto

“I’ve been asking for a broader review on what has been the problem here,” she said in an interview.

Lanterra Developments said in a statement late Wednesday that it had made the decision to fully remove the problematic tempered glass in its Grosvenor, Grenville and Bedford properties, where glass has shattered and fell to the ground this summer.

The company also said that the tempered glass on these balconies will be replaced with laminated glass that’s similar to the kind used in car windshields.

“The advantage of utilizing laminated glass,” Lanterra said, “is that in combination with using the latest available railing technologies, these laminated panels retain their structure in the event of a fracture and stay in place on the balcony should any breakage occur.”

According to Jim Laughlin, deputy chief building official for the city of Toronto, there have been nine incidents of falling balcony glass at five different buildings since December, 2010.

Four of those incidents occurred at the north tower of Lanterra’s Murano Condominiums development and one happened at the south tower of the same development.

Two occurred at another Lanterra building, 1 Bedford Rd., and the remaining two happened at Festival Tower, the condominium above the TIFF Bell Lightbox developed by Daniels Corp.

Toronto, like cities and towns throughout the province, complies with the Ontario Building Code, which sets out certain minimum requirements for building. The code sets out both tempered and laminated glass as options for guards, doors and panels.

“Is it minimum standards with the Ontario building code that we should be beefing up? What’s going on here? I think the general public desperately wants to know and I certainly do,” Ms. Wong-Tam said. “Perhaps the minimum standards are not good enough and if they’re not good enough then what do we need to make it better.”

Concord-based Toro Aluminum Railings Inc. was contracted by Lanterra to do some of the balcony guard rails on the Murano development’s north tower, as well as the work on the south tower and on 1 Bedford Rd. It was also contracted by Daniels Corp. to do work at the Festival Tower, according to Toro’s website.

Noting that Toro has worked on more than 100 buildings in the last five years, the company’s vice-president Mike D’Agnillo said, “If you did have a person that does a certain volume, you would expect that the problems within the industry would be representative of the volume that they do.”

“Our company is working endlessly, 20-hour days,” he added, “trying to help the industry figure out what the problem is out there and to get to the bottom of it.”

Ms. Wong-Tam said she has been looking into instances throughout the world where tempered glass has proved faulty.

“Perhaps that’s one thing that we need to look at: What type of glass are we using?” she said.

In Australia, the building code has made it mandatory that tempered glass be heat soaked, an expensive test that weeds out glass that could crack under heat pressure. The rule applies to buildings with glazing more than five metres off the ground.

“Otherwise the risk is ... if a tempered glass broke it would just simply fall straight out from that opening and then there’s a risk that it could fall on somebody,” said Carley Armstrong, the national marketing manager of Australian Glass Group, a national glass industry provider.

In 2000, local media reported that 1,687 tempered-glass panels built into guardrails at Cleveland Browns Stadium had to be replaced with laminated ones. The costly move, estimated to be \$1-million (U.S.), came after two panels shattered at the year-old football stadium.

In south Florida, moreover, hurricane seasons prompted changes to glass regulation throughout the 1990s. The Miami Herald reported that after a hurricane demolished much of the area, and glass went flying, building codes about tempered glass on exteriors became stricter.

Jeff Rigot, who has worked in the industry for more than 23 years, said tempered glass is still used in parts of the state, however, because it's cheaper than other options.

“Economics aside, I think laminated glass is a better solution for any building,” he said. “Unlike tempered glass it gives you the added benefit of security for glass fallout.”