

June 26, 2012

Ontario strengthens building code for new balcony glass

TORONTO

After a slew of falling glass on Toronto streets last summer, the Ontario government is strengthening its building code surrounding balcony glass for newly constructed buildings.

At least 13 glass balcony panes exploded in downtown Toronto between December and June 2011. There were also a few incidents last August and September, including one where a piece of falling glass injured a woman walking on the street below. The incidents were associated with Lanterra Developments.

Many of the incidents involved tempered glass and the new requirements will make use of heat-strengthened laminated glass, the same type used in windshields and is less prone to shatter. As of July 1, construction companies will be required to: use heat-strengthened laminated glass when glass is close to the edge of a balcony; and use heat-strengthened laminated glass or heat-soaked tempered glass where glass balcony guards are inset from the edge of the balcony.

These requirements are based on the Expert Advisory Panel on Glass Panels in Balcony Guards' recommendations.

“The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) supports the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Panel on Glass in Balcony Guards. These amendments will impose new standards, making Ontario’s Building Code provisions the most stringent in Canada with respect to the use of glass panels in balcony guards,” said Michael Steele, RESCON technical standards director and panel member.

The Expert Advisory Panel was composed of 25 members including engineering consultants, building code consultants, developers, contractors, professional designers, municipal building inspectors, insurance providers, and members of codes and standards writing bodies.

The amendment requires compliance on a go-forward basis and does not require existing buildings to retrofit to the new requirement.

Until now, building owners had taken their own preventative approaches. In August, Lanterra announced it would replace the tempered glass on its balconies with laminated glass and all Lanterra projects in development will make similar use of laminated glass designs. In April, condominium developer Concord Adex put protective mesh around the glass balconies on three of its properties.

The requirements from the Expert Advisory Panel are intended as an interim solution to ensure public safety while the Canadian Standards Association develops a national technical standard for glass panels in balcony guards.