

Press Statement: "final draft"

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"Check Your Buildings Now" warns PAM

It is indeed a tragedy that 6 lives were lost, many more were injured and traumatised due to a fire at Hospital Sultan Aminah yesterday. We pray for the perished and offer our condolences to their families, and quick recovery to the injured.

While investigations are being carried out by the authorities to establish the root cause of the fire, it begs the question:

Are our buildings safe?

Statistically 1 in 5 buildings inspected by Architect Centre in Malaysia are deemed to be unsafe. Most of these unsafe buildings have not been properly managed and maintained. Others were due to unresolved unsafe conditions from newly completed buildings.

Serious deficiencies are usually associated with a range of issues from defective slope drainage, unauthorised modification to electrical system, unattended fire protection + detection system, obstructed fire staircases, inoperable fire doors, water leaks into critical plant rooms, bio-hazards from mold, and sewerage leaks from dilapidated sanitary pipes.

The Commissioner of Buildings "COB"s are inundated with numerous complaints from purchasers over defective workmanship for new buildings. Many serious unsafe defective conditions remained unresolved, and are passed on to the JMC or Management Cooperation. Many of these unresolved conditions go unnoticed until much later, or are discovered during an independent inspection.

This time, it is a fire in a major hospital, before that, a structural failure of the roof feature at a landmark building in Penang which caused the death of passing motorists. Sometime back, there was a deadly gas explosion in a high rise condominium near KLCC killing the occupant; and another massive gas explosion at a shopping mall in Subang Jaya. Have we forgotten the collapsed of the Terengganu stadium roof and Highland Towers? At time of writing this article, the local media reported an escalator that "exploded" in a local shopping mall.

Between 2002-2010, there were 538 reported cases of electrical accidents by Suruhan Tenaga (ST) in Malaysia. A baby was orphaned when a Japanese expatriate husband and wife were found electrocuted in the Mont Kiara apartment due to a defective electrical earthing from the hot water tank.

Surely, we do not need more headlines and tragic accidents to spur us into action to ensure the safety of our buildings.

Like a car, after a new building is completed, it requires periodic inspections, maintenance, care and upkeep. A building has many regulatory provisions that are constructed to ensure the comfort, safety and health of its occupants and staff. These provisions will usually include structural design, fire detection, fire escapes, fire fighting, electrical supply and distribution, lifts, escalators, pumps, water, sanitary discharge and in certain locations - slopes, retaining walls and drains. These systems that are incorporated into our buildings must be periodically inspected, maintained and when necessary, repaired or replaced when the life cycle has expired. Like your car that needs to have that new replacement battery, brake pads, tyres or wipers once every so often, it is not rocket science that our buildings also need their due checks, maintenance, repairs and replacement. The reality is quite the opposite, especially for stratified high rise properties that are most unsafe statistically.

Unfortunately, our current laws are inadequate to ensure the overall safety of a building. One such rather peculiar law is Section 85A Akta Jalan, Parit dan Bangunan (Pindaan) 1994 Akta A903 that require mandatory periodic inspection by a Structural Engineer for buildings 5 storeys and above; exceeding 10 years old. Surely, the safety of buildings is not merely limited to a structural inspection conducted once every 10 years!

Therefore, it is not unusual that many local Authorities are faced with practical difficulties with enforcement, even towards government owned assets.

It is essential for the Government agencies to consolidate current fragmented building inspection by-laws into a simple and effective : "Periodic Building Safety Inspection" that encompasses all aspects of building safety.

Getting one's own house in order is prudent. We urge the various federal agencies, state and local authorities to kick start "safety inspections" beginning with their own buildings. Private building owners

are encourage to take pro-active steps to manage and maintain their investments with greater care and attention.

The message from us is loud and clear to all owners and occupants of private, commercial and public buildings : "check the safety of your buildings now". The condition of your property may be a ticking time bomb and if left unattended can cause injury or the loss of lives of your loved ones, employees, tenants and customers.

We must have courage, no matter how unpopular or difficult, to change the current mindset that the homes we live in, the places we work, schools we send our children, public places we use, be accorded uncompromising standards of safety.

The best building designs by Architects and Engineers will quickly and surely deteriorate if we do not improve our maintenance culture.

Prevention is better than Cure.

"Let's do things right 1st time, everytime."

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Architect Centre SB (a subsidiary of Pertubuhan Akitik Malaysia, PAM)

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