

The seven most overlooked aspects of building maintenance

SOLUTIONS TO BEST MANAGED PROPERTY



When we hear news of mishaps such as fire, electrocution or building collapses, we are inadvertently reminded to check our own homes to prevent such untoward incidents. However, with so many aspects of a building to take care of, including its hardware and software, where do we begin, especially if we live in a stratified high-rise?

Architect Centre Sdn Bhd accredited architect and trainer Anthony Lee Tee has identified seven of the most commonly overlooked aspects when it comes to property maintenance, especially in a stratified residence. Lee was a judge at EdgeProp Malaysia's Best Managed Property Awards 2018 and a speaker at EdgeProp.my Symposium on Excellent Property Management 2018.

"Ultimately, the developer's reputation and track record play an important role, so do your leg work and research before signing on the dotted line," says Lee, noting that the design and quality of the development determine the sustainability of its long-term maintenance and management.

"There needs to be an active participation by owners and residents as well, by taking ownership of any arising issues, shouldering the responsibility, and understanding and accepting community living," he says.



Beyond the usual upkeep of common property, these are the top seven most common but often neglected aspects in building maintenance that we should pay more attention to.

1 Unidentified (unresolved) common area defects

Lee notes that after the formation of the joint management body (JMB), there needs to be an assessment of the condition of all the equipment in the common area such as the pumps, lifts, water tanks, facade, fire-fighting equipment and electrical installations.

"More often than not, the JMB is unable to properly assess these types of defects as these issues are very technical in nature. Some of these common area defects may have been [the result of] inadequate repairs during the defects liability period (DLP), hence their reappearance after the DLP period. It can get more difficult and complicated in a mixed strata development," he points out.

As a result, defects are often identified years later when an equipment breaks down, and such conditions often raise serious safety concerns for properties and lives. Lee suggests that, when in doubt, engage the services of independent building inspectors to provide a condition report for the common areas.

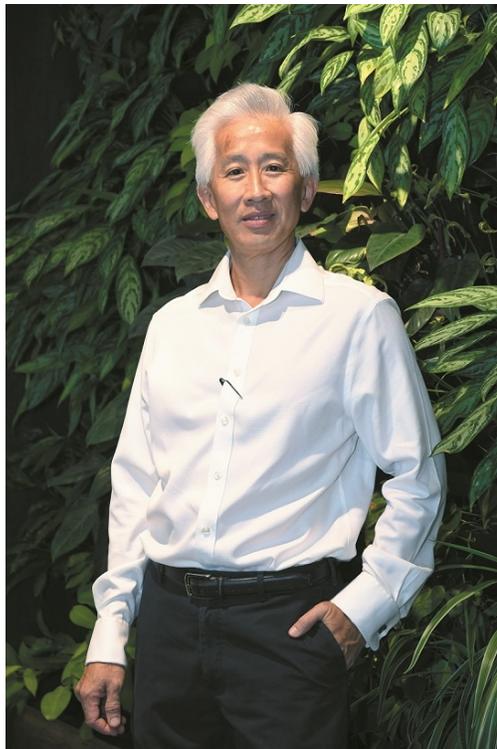
2 Fire-fighting equipment maintenance



A building that has been designed and constructed in compliance with the Uniform Building By-Laws is usually equipped for proper detection, evacuation and compartmentation (to isolate and prevent the spread of smoke and fire) and extinguishment of fire.

Lee explains that there are two systems when it comes to fire fighting, namely the passive system (escape staircases, fire-resistant doors and walls, and the use of Class “0” non-combustible building materials) and active system (detectors, fire lifts, fire control centres, extinguishers, hose reels, sprinklers and fans).

Collectively, the two systems must be properly managed and maintained to perform as intended in the event of an emergency, says Lee. Unfortunately, he notes that Architect Centre inspectors frequently find fire-fighting equipment to be ill-managed and not maintained. “Many of these unsafe buildings do not have valid fire certificate. Shockingly, many buildings with valid fire certificates are also found with inoperable fire-fighting equipment,” he laments.



Lee: There needs to be an active participation by owners and residents as well, by taking ownership of any arising issues. (Photo by Low Yan Yeing/EdgeProp.my)

3 Fire door

A common lack of awareness is the importance of fire doors in the buildings. Lee observes that many fire doors are either intentionally left open with door stoppers – especially in lift lobbies and corridors – or locked and obstructed, or often incorrectly “repaired” or modified by the maintenance personnel with unregulated spare parts such as handles, locks and closers. “Fire doors are meant to isolate the spread of fire or smoke, and are rated to be resistant to fire for one or two hours [depending on the location of risk];” reiterates Lee.

4 Electrical installation

There has been a widespread use of unregulated residual current device (RCD) in many buildings throughout Malaysia, which contravenes the regulations stipulated by the Energy Commission (EC), notes Lee. “The RCD is a highly sensitive equipment that acts as a safety device to prevent accidental electrocution. The sensitivity of RCD performance to protect lives is rated in accordance to the location of risk. Architect Centre inspectors frequently find unregulated or incorrect RCD specifications in buildings. The RCD specifications regulated by the EC are often neglected with the installation of domestic hot water heaters in homes,” he says.



5 Water leaks

Lee also observes that many modern buildings are designed with flat roofs constructed by concrete slabs that are exposed to the rain and sun. “We have found most concrete flat roofs to have some degree of water seepage or leaks regardless of age – even the new buildings. Water leaks are also prevalent in bathroom slabs, particularly for high-rise apartments,” he notes.

This can be attributed to the fact that water leaks are often repaired using a “stop-gap” method using polyurethane-grouting (PU grouting). Water leaks will re-occur at locations that have been PU grouted – often after the DLP period. Leaks must be repaired properly by hacking away the tiles or finishes on top, and applying fresh waterproofing membrane on the exposed concrete. Obviously, this method is costly and time consuming, which is why many are opting for the stop-gap PU grouting methods, explains Lee, emphasising that a water leak will not go away by itself and must be fixed properly and permanently.



6 Gas piping

Piped central cooking gas (liquefied petroleum gas or natural gas) is found in many strata properties and shopping malls. Lee notes that the pipes that distribute the gas are painted in yellow and there is usually a large gas supply tank located on one end of the yellow pipes distributed to individual strata units.

The design, construction, commissioning and inspections are highly regulated by the EC. The EC also sanctions and regulates gas contractors. These yellow pipes must be inspected once every three years. Many properties are not aware of this regulation, he adds.

However, according to him, although the yellow/gas pipes usually terminate in the kitchen wall, the location of the cooking stove or oven may be in another part of the kitchen.

“The ‘last mile’ connection from the yellow gas pipe to the kitchen stove or oven is uncontrolled. Gas accidents are known to have originated at ‘last-mile’ connection gas leaks. Kitchen interior contractors may also accidentally pierce buried gas pipes in kitchen walls, which are often unmarked,” he explains.

Gas leak detectors are not mandated in Malaysia. Thus, such leaks may go unnoticed until it is too late.

7 Lack of preventive maintenance

Many owners, says Lee, fail to plan for preventive or scheduled maintenance as well as lifecycle repairs and replacements.

“Typical examples are the lifts, pumps and repainting. Failure to carry out simple and cheaper maintenance of worn-out bearings and oil/filter change could cause a system to break down. This will entail big-ticket repairs that the JMB or management corporation could ill afford,” he warns.

As a result, “the property becomes dilapidated quickly as it looks and becomes unsafe, becomes unhealthy, lacks appeal, as well as loses its residents, yield and value”, he says, adding that a property that is well managed will ultimately provide better returns on investment.

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