

CRITICAL INSPECTIONS:

AROUND THE HASSLES

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Many cities within the United States have a critical inspection ordinance. In 1978, Chicago was the first city to begin drafting an ordinance making façade inspections mandatory by qualified individuals. Over the course of time, revisions have been made and enforcement of the ordinances has become stronger. In 2002, the current ordinance became effective in Chicago.

Critical façade inspections take an up-close look at a building and address physical failures. These physical failures take form in cracks, loose masonry units, and flaking or spalling of the stone during the course of a building's lifetime. In most cities, the ordinance requires qualified professionals, usually architectural engineers, to examine the façade of a building by either hand or tool. In order to comply with this ordinance, scaffolding must be erected or hung from the building to get individuals close enough to complete their inspection.

Chicago's ordinance states that critical inspections must take place every four, eight, or 12 years, depending on the materials used to construct the exterior walls. In addition to this, Chicago requires all buildings that are 80 feet tall or higher to comply with this ordinance. Other cities vary in the time allowed between inspections and in height requirements.

Chicago's ordinance states that the exterior walls subject to inspection include 50% of the area on all façades for critical exam, plus 100% of areas adjacent to building corners, and 100% of terra cotta façade elements. Once again, this ordinance is different in every city. A building owner or manager should check his or her local city code to get an accurate descriptions of the ordinance.

Noncompliance with these ordinances can be costly. For instance, in Chicago, the fine for failing to meet city code is \$500 to \$1,000 a day. In other cities, one can expect imprisonment in addition to a fine. These cities take their critical inspection codes seriously and so should owners and managers. These codes not only increase the safety of everyone who comes in contact with a building, they also save money.

Critical inspections are not meant to be a nuisance to building owners, but instead, a help. By requiring buildings to go through critical inspections, cities are making it easier for building owners to remember that all buildings, regardless of size or age, need preventive maintenance. Preventive maintenance ensures the ability to catch small problems before they become more complex and costly problems. This will also assist in lowering a building's operating expenses.

It is certain that at some point and time, all buildings will need some form of repair work. When it has been determined that restoration work has to be done on a building, many owners begin to feel apprehensive about the process of choosing a contractor. Many people feel that contractors are a "necessary evil" when it comes to repair work. However, here are 10 easy steps to help individuals make wise decisions when choosing a contractor to perform the necessary restoration work on their building.

1. Ask for references and check with the individuals to hear what those people think of the contractor.
2. Interview each potential inspection and restoration contractor to help determine the contractor's ability to perform the work competently.
3. Go over scheduling with the contractor. Make sure that they will be able to complete the inspection and

By Jeremy Johnson




Flying high over Wacker Drive in downtown Chicago, inspectors with Western Waterproofing Co., Inc. work on a building's façade per Chicago's façade inspection ordinance.

- restoration in the timeframe that has been given.
- 4. Ask the contractor about daily work shifts and talk about concerns over interference with business within the building. Make sure that building operations will not be interrupted during the restoration process.
- 5. Check on the contractor's competency in budgeting projects to make sure that the price given is the price the owner should expect to pay.
- 6. Learn about each contractor's experience in projects similar to the type of work the individual building needs.
- 7. Ask about walk-through procedures after the work is completed and see how the contractor stands behind his or her work.
- 8. Inquire what the contractor's D&B (Dunn and Bradstreet) rating is. This will ensure that the company has the resources to complete the job.

- 9. Ask for the contractor's safety rating. Make sure that the contractor hired is not going to be a liability to the building.
- 10. Finally, ask the architectural engineer performing the inspection for a few references on contractors. Restoration contractors and architectural engineers work hand-in-hand on many projects and the engineers know who will get restoration projects done properly, efficiently, and safely.

Do not allow this ordinance to become too overwhelming. The key is to remember that problems found today will be much smaller than the problems that are ignored.

Critical inspections and restoration needs are concerns for every building owner or manager. Whether it is the Water Tower Place in Chicago or the building at the end of the block, preventative maintenance will ensure the longevity of these structures for years to come. 

Jeremy Johnson

Jeremy Johnson started his career with one of the largest general contractors in the country specializing in the construction of highways and bridges. He joined the Western Waterproofing team in 2001 and since then has been responsible for over \$12M of restoration work. The Western Construction Group is a specialty contractor with 35 offices across the country and is ranked in the top 10 largest masonry and concrete specialty contractors.

