



The Tell-Tale Signs of Water Damage

by Robin Braden

Does your building have any water damage?
Do you know what to look for?

Many associations do not realize the damage that water can cause; nor do they know what to look for. There are many telltale signs that your building reveals when water is causing damage. The good news is if after inspection seepage is found, you can prevent further damage by stopping the leak. Also, if your building is under construction, there are waterproofing materials that should be applied for a variety of applications. The following are areas that are susceptible to water damage and the signs to look for when inspecting them.

- **Foundations and Concrete Block**—The area where you are most likely to find a problem is the juncture between the slab/concrete block and the soil. It is very important that the correct concrete and waterproofing materials are used for the foundation and subterranean walls. It is also important, especially in Florida with our low water table, that moisture barriers are used. Unfortunately, many contractors cut corners and don't use them. An inspection of the foundation can reveal any possible seepage. If seepage is found and discoloration, rust spots, or cracks are visible, injection systems and negative-side crystalline can be used to waterproof the area

without further damage. I would also recommend chemical grouting to stop any seepage through the grout of the concrete block. Further waterproofing, such as liquid and sheet membranes, can be applied to the interior of the foundation if it is new construction.

- **Roofs**—Roofs are other major areas of concern when it comes to water damage due to the area that can be affected by a leak. Deterioration or crumbling of any concrete, stains on the ceiling or walls, and visible cracks near the roof could be signs of water damage. Concrete tile roofs can have water damage if they were not properly waterproofed during installation. The best defense is to inspect, inspect, inspect. Several waterproofing underlayments and liquid applied or elastomeric coatings can be used for repair and re-roofing.
- **Balconies**—Concrete balconies along our coastline are exposed to elements that attack structural reinforcement systems (specifically steel). Once the corrosion process begins, small cracks and spalling lead to an accelerated attack upon the balconies integrity. You'll want to look for rust stains or spots, crusting or flaking, and of course cracks. Balcony leaks can be a serious issue because of the significant damage to units and surrounding common areas, not to mention the possible safety concern of the structure itself. Water intrusion from balconies can damage ceilings, walls, carpets, and hardwood floors and lead to mold in the walls. Balcony leaks can also go undetected if not regularly inspected by professionals. Balconies and their railings may need additional structural support depending on the severity of damage. There are products specifically manufactured for balconies and the railings. I would recommend

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you call your local, specialty concrete supplier to get a non-biased list of products that you can discuss with contractors.

What Can I Do to Avoid Costly Repairs?

Do it right the first time. As callous as it sounds, when it comes to waterproofing, not doing it right the first time can have truly disastrous results. A leaky foundation or roof in a residential building can damage finishes and furnishings, even the structure itself. In a commercial building, water can ruin expensive equipment and disrupt vital work. Waterproofing isn't pretty, and since it's going to get covered or buried anyway, it's easy to skimp and go for damp-proofing instead of painting on that old black stuff that comes in a bucket. But damp-proofing will only retard moisture; it can't stop a flow of water bearing against the foundation or roof. Waterproofing products can be applied to concrete block, wood, and poured concrete and usually come with warranties.

Another way to avert major construction repairs is to inspect regularly. I can't stress enough how important it is that existing condominiums have their buildings inspected, especially those located along the beach. Beachside condominiums are more susceptible to corrosion and water damage due to the salty air, sand, wind, and unfortunately storms. You, as the condominium association resident or manager, have the option of handling your property proactively or reactively. If you chose the latter and are reactive, you may find yourself dealing with major construction repairs and very possibly a special assessment. The choice is how much do you want to spend now in order for you to save later?

Take my advice and don't wait for a small problem to become a huge headache! Have your roof, balconies, and foundation inspected annually. You can contact your local specialty concrete supplier to conduct a non-biased inspection (at no cost). They can provide a list of products and reliable contractors for any damage that they find. Remember to be proactive in your management of the condominium because early detection can save thousands and prevent further deterioration.

Robin Braden is the Purchasing and Marketing Agent for All-State Products with locations in Ft. Myers, Miami, Pompano, and West Palm Beach. For more information, visit www.aspfla.com. ■



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