



# Concrete Repair FAQ

by Terri Chalaire, PE

**Q** Our handyman has been repairing areas of broken concrete and caulking cracks. At what point should we consider hiring a contractor for repairs?

**A** Although well intentioned, repairs performed by association staff could end up causing more harm than good. The repair can loosen and fall, causing injury or property damage, creating liability for the association, or the repair may not be performed in accordance with

requirements, which can make the repair become unsafe and short lived. There are published standards and codes regarding how to perform proper concrete repairs. An association should consider hiring a contractor after the area has been investigated by an engineer and a proper repair method has been written. If a contractor is called in first, before an engineer, they will usually recognize if the repair is significant and recommend hiring an engineer. All building departments require engineering specifications for structural repairs to concrete.

**Q** My association is having problems collecting from its owners, and the budget is limited for starting new projects. How long can the association wait before having repairs performed on damaged areas of concrete?

**A** Recently, we have seen a decrease of repairs projects and an increase in delays of required repairs. Foreclosures, vacancies, and problems

collecting money contribute to the delays of having repairs performed. Repairs are not renovations. Renovations usually improve the property and provide new, exciting, and updated amenities. Repairs, unfortunately, are required overtime just to maintain the building's value and safety and are often overlooked and not considered a priority because the residents do not see significant changes to the property after the money is spent. The reality is that associations are required to maintain the safety of the structure. The association should not wait to have structural repairs performed. The condominium documents provide for the collection of money for necessary building repairs that affect the structures safety and for the collection of these funds. I believe there are also laws that allow associations to foreclose on units, which will force the banks to stop the stalling on foreclosure actions and get the process moving to get new owners in. Associations should contact their attorney regarding this. There are also programs available from banks to help associations finance projects required to maintain the safety and structural integrity of buildings. Another option for buildings is to have repairs performed in phases or at a few units at a time. This is usually not cost effective, but can help spread out the costs of building repairs. The more locations that are repaired in one project, the more cost effective the project is. One set of specifications is required, one permit fee, one mobilization fee by the contractor, etc.

**Q** I noticed a crack in the ceiling of my balcony. There are also cracks in the floor at some spots. What are the indications of concrete problems at my building?

**A** Cracks in ceilings and floors are common in concrete framed structures, new or older. The cracks can be significant and contribute to dangerous conditions and concrete damage or they can be insignificant, not causing a structural problem or other concern, or they can be somewhere in the middle, possibly allowing water intrusion and problems down the road. The indications of concrete problems are dependent on the shape and size of the crack, the configuration

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of the steel reinforcing bar in the slab, the general configuration of the slab, and the location of the crack relative to the balcony configuration. A crack or multiple cracks usually indicate some type of problem. Experience and knowledge can diagnose the crack and the type of repair, if any,

that is required. Indications of significant problems are missing pieces of the balcony slab, falling or loose bits of concrete on or around the crack, visible brown rust spots near the crack, heaving tiles near the cracks, and hollow, delaminated sounding near the crack.

**Q** We are planning on having some concrete repairs done over the summer. In order to get bids for budgeting what kind of information will we need to give to bidders and what kind of license should they have?

**A** Obtaining bids from contractors is not only required by the associations, but can definitely be helpful in preparing budgets and timelines for work. The most efficient way to get bids is to provide all of the bidders with the same information, that way, when the bids come in, they can be compared apples to apples. If you call three contractors to look at your building, you will usually get three dramatically different bids with different pricing arrangements, different repair materials, and different repair methods. This data is not useful and will require extensive interviewing and re-working of the bids by each contractor just so the bids can be somewhat compared. An effective way to achieve comparable bids is to have an engineering survey performed and a specifications and bid package written. This package can be provided to multiple contractors. An engineering company with a Certificate of Authorization

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issued by the state can provide these surveys and specifications, which can also be used later to obtain a building permit for the work. These engineering companies are qualified by engineers holding a Professional Engineer license (PE license). Quality contractors, who are familiar with concrete repairs, will welcome the package and be able to provide pricing based on what is requested in the package. The type of license the contractor should have is a General Contractor license (GC).

**Q** The association is planning a painting project for the entire building. There are areas of visible damage at building walls and on balcony edges. Will the painters fix these problems as they paint the building?

**A** A quality painting contractor will not paint over these problems. The problems should be brought to the attention of building management. Painting contractors do not typically fix these problems. Depending on the type of damage, a general contractor is usually required to perform these repairs. Many times, the damages are structural in nature and require the use of proper repair methods, specifications, and inspections during the work. It is usually prudent for associations to have painting projects performed after building repair projects are performed. If a painting project is already planned, the building can be surveyed, and depending on the extent of damages, the

repairs can be coordinated to be performed before or even in conjunction with the painting project.

**Q** Our building is currently having concrete repairs done. How can we avoid having to do this again?

**A** Although necessary, concrete repair projects can be a headache for all involved. Having repairs performed the right way will ensure a long-lasting repair at that location. Having inspections performed during the repairs is crucial to ensure proper repairs are performed. A small cut corner can mean a significant problem later on. Also, damaged areas of



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concrete will get worse faster over time. This means repairs should be performed every few years. This will maximize the efficiency of repairs projects and limit the growth and spread of damaged areas.

**If quality repairs were performed, those areas should not require repair for 10–20 years. If limited or “lick-and-stick” repairs were performed, or if corners were cut, repairs could be needed much sooner than that, perhaps in months or only a few years.**

Unfortunately, repairs performed at one location do not mean there won't be problems at other nearby or unrelated locations. Brand new concrete at Unit 506 does not mean the 20 year old concrete at Unit 809 will last forever. The best approach for an association to minimize repair projects and costs of projects is to get a handle on any repairs necessary, have

the repairs performed, then monitor the building every year or so to determine when the next set of repairs should be done.

**Q My building is under three stories. I heard that my association may not need to hire an engineer for a repair project. Is that true?**

**A** No. An engineer is required for all structural repair projects. The building departments require engineering specifications to be

submitted for the contractor to obtain a permit. The building department does this to ensure a proper repair method is used. Being fewer than three stories will usually eliminate, however, the need for a “Special Inspector” (SI). Building departments are especially concerned about mid-rise and tall buildings (over 3 stories), so they require special licensing of the engineer (PE and SI license) and have specific reporting requirements for these buildings. Buildings fewer than three stories are not considered “Threshold” buildings. Usually, the engineering company that provides the specifications will be qualified to perform this role as needed.

**Q We had concrete repairs done 3 years ago. How long before we will need to have more repairs done.**

**A** It will vary. If quality repairs were performed, those areas should not require repair for 10–20 years. If limited or “lick-and-stick” repairs were performed, or if corners were cut, repairs could be needed much sooner than that, perhaps in months or only a few years. Also, repairs performed at one location will not eliminate repairs needed at a different location. Damaged areas present themselves at different rates. Typically, we have observed the most efficient repair projects are performed every few years.

*Terri Chalaire, PE is the owner of Chalaire and Associates, Inc. For more information, visit [www.chalaireandassociates.com](http://www.chalaireandassociates.com).* ■



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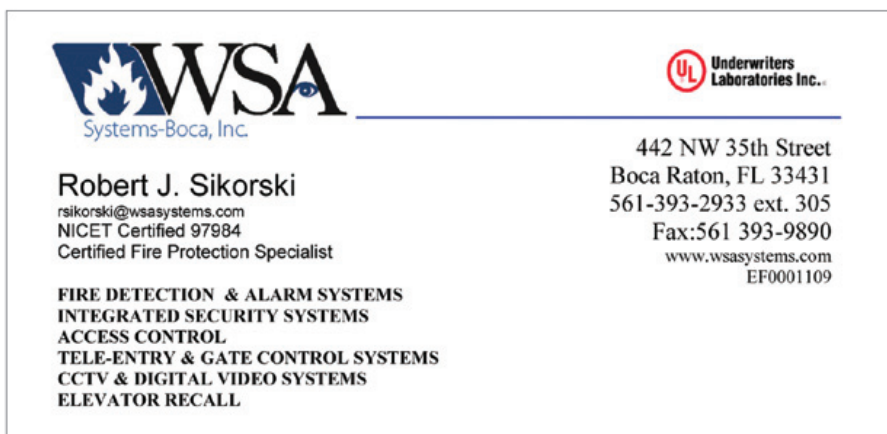
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