

Make your balcony structurally safe before socialising

With restrictions easing Victorians able to have friends and family visit their homes should make sure their balconies are safe first.

The state building regulator has warned homeowners to regularly [check and maintain any balconies](#) at their properties as more people visit over the warmer months.

Victorian Building Authority (VBA) State Building Surveyor Andrew Cialini said balconies can be a serious safety risk if not properly built and looked after.

“Look for signs of wear and tear, there are many things that can affect the structural integrity of a balcony, deck or balustrade, such as overloading, termites, wet rot and corrosive effects,” he said.

“A correctly designed and maintained balcony should take these risk factors into account, but we urge owners and tenants to carry out visual inspections yearly to protect themselves and their guests.”

Timber balconies can be impacted by insect attack and decay while concrete balconies can be made unsafe when concrete cracks and flakes or when reinforcement corrodes, often due to moisture.

Balustrades are often made of various materials such as concrete, steel or timber and need to comply with building regulations and standards. Simple things such as re-tensioning tension wire balustrades, checking and tightening fixings and treating signs of corrosion greatly improve the long term safety of balustrades.

Mr Cialini said groups of people and heavy items such as large pot plants or barbecues can provide additional loads for a balcony to support.

“The balcony may not have been designed to support so much extra weight, and in combination with poor maintenance, if it becomes overloaded it could result in a tragedy,” he said.

“So before you have visitors over make sure you take a look at your balcony and check if it is structurally sound and safe.”

It is important to be aware of the load capacity or total mass your deck or balcony is designed to carry.

Homeowners should consult the original specifications if they have access to them or have a structural engineer or registered building practitioner conduct an assessment.

Warning signs to check for include:

- puddles of water at the base of posts
- puddles of water on the deck or balcony surface
- rotting or loose balustrades and loose or rusted brackets and bolts
- cracked concrete or signs of leaning
- cracked or weak mortar in brick structures
- dislodged brickwork/masonry.

Most well-maintained timber balconies should last for at least 20 years, and a well-maintained concrete balcony should last for 40 to 50 years.

Anyone wanting to replace or build a new balcony or deck must make sure it is designed and constructed legally, which means [applying for a building permit](#) and have the balcony appropriately designed.

For more information about [keeping your balcony, deck or balustrade safe](#), visit the VBA website.