

'Tis the season to check the safety of decks and balconies

Summer is the season Victorians love to be outdoors on decks and balconies, enjoying the weather and the opportunity to catch up with friends and family for a barbeque or a party.

That means it is important to ensure your home's deck or balcony, whether constructed of timber, steel or concrete, is safe and stable.

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) recommends residents of properties with a deck or balcony conduct a regular visual and physical check for signs of deterioration and reduced structural stability. When it comes to the safety of family and friends, there can be no compromises, so engage a registered building practitioner or structural engineer to inspect for potential problems and carry out maintenance repairs where necessary.

Wet rot, termites and environmental conditions – particularly where structures are exposed to sea spray or other corrosive influences – can cause damage to balconies, decks and balustrades, making them unsafe to use. Rain and sea spray, aside from leading to timber rot, also increase the risk of deterioration, as water-born salt accelerates the corrosion of unprotected steel, reinforcing steel and steel fixings.

Beyond these, pest and environmental influences are another consideration. For example, what load is the structure designed to carry? People and items located on the deck or balcony, such as a barbecue, pot plants and furniture, should all be considered, so it is vital to be aware of the load capacity or total mass your deck or balcony is designed to carry. Consult the original specifications if you have access to them, or have a structural engineer or registered building practitioner conduct an assessment. It is an investment in safety and peace of mind.

While a well-maintained timber balcony or deck should last for many years, and a well-maintained concrete balcony even longer, all such structures should be inspected annually.

Tell-tale signs of deterioration or structural problems include:

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

The VBA's Director of Technical and Regulation, Darryl O'Brien, said inspecting balconies, decks and balustrades should form part of the maintenance routine for any property with attached raised structures.

"Before summer is in full swing, thoroughly inspect your outdoor areas. If you see anything unusual, or you're unsure about the structural integrity of your balcony, deck or balustrading, avoid the area and contact a registered building practitioner or structural engineer to conduct an inspection," Dr O'Brien said.

For more information about [keeping your balconies, decks and balustrades safe](#) to use all year round, visit the VBA website or contact your local council.

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