

# Condominium Home Owners Association

A non-profit association serving strata owners since 1976

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Headline: **“Get to Know” and “How to Care” For your Balcony**

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## **Historical Reference:**

In recent years many buildings on the West Coast of British Columbia have been affected by water ingress. Moisture related damage often occurs at the balcony structures, and in the wall assemblies to which they are connected.

Most problems associated with water infiltration and premature deterioration of balcony components can be related to the design of the balcony, construction deficiencies, durability or compatibility of the materials used, lack of maintenance and renewal of balcony components, improper maintenance of balcony components, or some combination of these factors.

Regular review, maintenance, and timely renewal of balcony components is essential for preventing damage to balcony structures. It is more economical to replace sealant and repair or replace the balcony waterproof membrane, as part of a scheduled maintenance program, than to be forced to repair or replace the wood framing in balcony structures and building walls caused by un-expected water ingress.

## **Scheduled Review of Balconies:**

Periodic reviews can be performed by various parties. Occupants can conveniently review their own units because they have both the opportunity and accessibility to do so. An independent party, such as a qualified professional, can be retained by the Strata Council or the Property Manager to undertake a scheduled maintenance review. There is less risk of missing serious deficiencies when the review is performed by a qualified professional. Such reviews should be routinely performed as part of a scheduled maintenance program regardless of who performs the task. This ensures that deficiencies will not go un-detected and propagate into more costly repairs. We recommend reviewing balconies at least once per year.

Listed below are the most common issues that pertain to balcony care and maintenance. This is not intended to be a complete list of all possible problems nor do these issues necessarily apply to all balconies.

## **When reviewing your balcony check the condition of the following components:**

- **Waterproof Membrane**

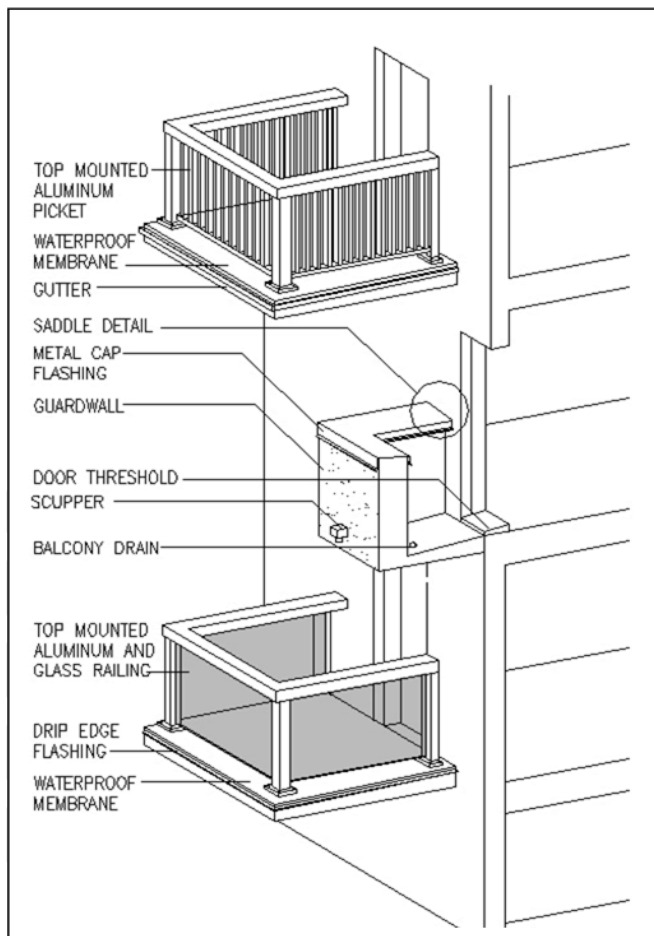
Perform a visual review of the balcony membrane for basic signs of wear and tear. Symptoms to take note of are **staining and algae growth, blisters, un-sealed joints, punctures, and cuts**. Typical locations to focus on are: tie-ins around floor drains and scupper drains, patio door sills, penetrations through the membrane where the guardrail is attached to the balcony, and joints where the balcony connects to the building wall (called a saddle detail).

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- **Surface Drainage**

Check that the balcony surface is draining properly. Drainage deficiencies include: **Water ponding in areas of the balcony that are lower than the floor drain or wall scupper, water ponding at balcony edges because the edges are too high, and water ponding against exterior walls.**

- **Railings and Guardwalls**

At aluminum railings with either picket or glass panel inserts, check for **corroded or missing fasteners, and damaged glass panels.** At wood railings, check for **algae staining, algae, weathered paint or sealant, corroded or missing fasteners, mitered corners with unsealed joints, and soft spots in the wood.**

### Three Types of Balconies

At solid guardwalls, check for **algae staining, unsealed joints in the metal flashing, and water ponding on top of the metal cap flashing.**

For all types of railing and guardwall check for unusual wobbliness or lateral deflection. Railings and guardwalls are supposed to be able to resist lateral force with negligible deflection. If you suspect a problem with the structural integrity of your railing or

guardwall notify your Strata Council or Property Manager. It is advisable to retain a qualified professional to perform an assessment and provide recommendations. **Do not apply excessive force and don't lean on railings and guardwalls that you suspect is structurally unsound. Access to the balcony should be restricted until an assessment by a qualified professional can be made**

- **Gutters and Downspouts/Rainwater Leaders**

Check that gutters are not clogged with debris that prevents drainage. Gutters that are not securely fastened to the building can affect the slope of a gutter and prevent proper drainage. Downspouts/rainwater leaders should also be checked for blockages that prevent drainage.

- **Sealant**

Check that sealants have not cracked, de-bonded from its surface, or become brittle. Sealants must be pliable, free of voids, and well adhered to its surface to perform properly. The most common locations of sealant at balconies are wall penetrations, balcony surfaces, and metal cap flashings (such as floor drains, scupper drains, patio doors, light fixtures, hose bibs, electrical boxes, railing fasteners, etc.).

- **Balcony Soffits and Balcony Venting**

Check the underside of balconies to ensure there is no blockage where venting has been installed. Not all balconies have or require soffit venting. However, where balconies have vinyl or metal soffit panels that are perforated for venting, the perforations should be kept clear. Where balconies have vent "strips" or vent "louvers" installed at the perimeter of the balcony soffit, the vent strips and louvers must also be kept clear

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- **Dryer Vents**

Check that dryer vents in balcony soffits are clear of lint build-up and debris.

**Recommendations on Maintaining Your Balcony:**

**Waterproof Membrane and Drainage**

Clean stains following the recommendations from the membrane manufacturer. As a minimum, use water with a mild detergent and a non abrasive cleaning tool. Do not power-wash balcony surfaces.

Provide drainage saucers beneath potted plants to prevent staining of the balcony membrane. Potted plants and their stands must be kept clear of drains.

Use extra care when storing a barbecue on a balcony or moving a barbecue across a balcony. Cuts or punctures in the membrane can occur from the sharp corners of a barbecue. Patio furniture legs can also cause damage to balcony membranes.

Cuts, punctures, and open joints in the membrane should be repaired promptly. Report deficiencies to your Strata Council or Property Manager to remedy.

**Railings and guardwalls**

Clean stains and algae using water with a mild detergent and a non abrasive cleaning tool. Wood should be painted, stained, or seal coated periodically to increase its water resistance. This work should be performed routinely as part of a maintenance program. If you encounter what you suspect may be a structural problem, refer the issue promptly to your Strata Council or Property Manager. Damaged and corroded fasteners must be replaced. Loose fasteners may be an indication of problems with the substrate material. For structural matters a qualified professional should be retained to provide a condition assessment and recommendations.

**Metal flashing**

Perform annual reviews to maintain the sealant used at metal flashing joints and standing seams. Replace as needed.

**Gutters and Downspouts/Rainwater Leaders**

Clear gutters of debris especially after Autumn leaves have fallen, and in the Spring. Report issues such as poor draining or overflowing gutters to your Strata Council or Property Manager to remedy.

**Sealant**

Sealant which has become brittle, has visible cracks and voids, or has lost its adhesion should be reported to your Strata Council or Property Manager to remedy.

Sealant which has failed or is missing at fastener heads should be reported to your Strata Council or Property Manager to remedy

In all cases, sealant should only be applied by a qualified applicator

**Balcony Soffits, Balcony Venting, and Dryer Vents**

Review these areas annually and clear debris and lint build-up from all vented soffits, vent strips, and vent louvers located at the underside of balconies

**Closing Remarks:**

Routine maintenance, early detection of problems, and timely resolution of those problems will provide the most economical assurance that your balcony will achieve its intended service life so that you will be able to enjoy your balcony for years to come.

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