

Are Your building's balconies safe with dry rot?

California's Senate Bill 721 (SB721) and Senate Bill 326 (SB326) Mandate Compliance by Statutory Deadlines

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As the deadline for the California Balcony Laws SB721 and SB326 comes closer and closer, the leading California-based engineering inspection company, EEEAdvisor, provide more tips for inspections of your buildings and apartments to ensure you can comply correctly and easily.

What Must Be Inspected? Exterior Elevated Elements (EEEs)

These two state laws are designed for buildings that contain **three or more dwelling units**. Senate Bill 326 is for condominiums, and Senate Bill 721 is for apartment buildings. The laws required inspections must be made to any elevated element of structures. Exterior Elevated Elements are building elements that are constructed of wood, have a walking surface, have any portion sitting 6-feet above the ground, and that extend outside of the four walls of a structure. Exterior Elevated Elements include balconies, outside decks, porches, exterior stairways, and exterior walkways that have a walking surface that is elevated more than six feet above ground level according to these ordinances. Required inspection includes waterproofing system supports and railings, and load bearing component.

Rotted materials are weak. If dry rot is allowed to grow unchecked for years, it can make an apartment building or home uninhabitable and unhealthy. “Deck and Balcony Inspection Bill,” Sb721 went into effect in California on January 1, 2019. It was enacted in response to a balcony collapse in Berkeley at the Liberty Gardens Apartments that resulted in the deaths and serious injuries of those occupying the structure at the time. The worst-case scenario is irreversible structural damage, often resulting in expensive repairs or demolition of a property. No one wants that! The sooner the mold is identified and its food supply is cut off—the better.

Dry rot has a four-stage life cycle:

1. It begins with dormant spores until moisture content exceeds 20 percent in a piece of timber, and a poor airflow situation presents itself.
2. Hyphae or thread-like appendages grow and expand outwards, absorbing moisture.
3. The thread or mycelial growth continues until it looks like cotton or wool. Sometimes the fibrous growth has a gray, yellowish, or light purple tint.
4. The fungal life cycle ends as spores are produced as the fungus' food source is depleted. The fungus dries out, turns into a white powder, and a foul odor develops in its proximity. The cycle starts again when conditions are optimal.

How Do To Repair Dry Rot Damage?

The most straightforward answer is—it depends. That might sound overly simplified, but it is true. Some types of damage are easier to mitigate and repair due to the extent of mold's progress through a wooden structure. Dry rot can spread like wildfire under the right circumstances. Remediation programs will look very different from one project to another. For example, an apartment building may have different needs than a hotel, business office, or historic home.

The first step in developing a custom remediation program involves hiring the right professionals. An expert inspector will be able to identify problem areas quickly and evaluate the severity of dry rot, and then make the appropriate recommendations to stabilize or replace damaged timbers. This person(s) can help property owners find crews to complete the necessary work. Property owners must be forewarned; program suggestions could be considerable and cost-prohibitive, especially for historic buildings.

Apartment owners and homeowners can also have their properties regularly inspected for water damage or leaks. Routine inspections of balcony, walkway, deck, stairways, will help prevent future issues or help identify them quickly. A systematic and preventative approach like what designed in [sb326](#) and [sb721](#) will save money and diminish costly repairs. Apartment owners, tenants, and homeowners can sleep better at night, not worrying if a silent monster is creeping in the walls and eaves at night.

We have always recommended to our clients to hire a professional engineer early before getting closer to the deadline. Not only you protect your tenant's safety today and avoid liability, but you also save a lot on the cost of repair and construction. For both SB721 and SB326, the deadline to comply to both laws is December 31 st of 2024. Here at EEEAdvisor, we aim to help you beat that deadline and prepare for any problems which you could encounter within your buildings. We have professional engineers with an extensive amount of experience who will make you more familiar with your inspection criteria.

Talk to the California professional engineering firm to find out more at [www.EEEadvisor.com].



Omid Ghanadiof is a co-founder of EEEAdvisor Engineering, a specialized engineering inspection firm active located in Southern California. EEEAdvisor Engineering assists rental property owners and homeowners associations (HOAs) with compliance with state mandated balcony inspections per Senate Bills 721 and 326. For more information, contact Mr. Ghanadiof at (805) 312-8513 or info@EEEadvisor.com.