

Worse than blue ice

The Council for Aluminium in Building (CAB) has highlighted the safety risks associated with reversible windows in high-rise residential buildings, following concerning information from a built environment reporting service writes CEO Nigel Headford



According to Collaborative Reporting for Safer Structures UK (CROSS UK), several windows designed to rotate for internal cleaning have fallen from a high-rise building façade, due to suspected hinge failures.

Investigations revealed that the reversible pivot hinges had given way in multiple incidents across different blocks of the building, resulting in the window casements detaching from their frames. It is not known what caused the hinges to fail on the retrofitted windows, installed around ten years ago as part of a refurb programme.

The incidents reported by CROSS UK are quite alarming. Windows crashing to the ground, from height, obviously pose a significant risk of harm to individuals below, which could result in serious injury, or even death. This is an issue that must be addressed without delay.

We would strongly urge building managers and accountable persons to implement inspection regimes, as CROSS UK suggests, and question historic specifications as part of ongoing safety management.

Hinges may not always be visible, so targeted inspections and photographic checks are imperative to identify risks.

We also urge designers and specifiers to ensure window systems are appropriate for the building height and usage, accounting for increased wind loads and the potential consequences of component failure.

CROSS UK also identifies environmental exposure, especially in coastal locations as an important consideration. It advocates the selection of hardware with verified performance data suitable for the specific window configuration and full understanding of the limitations of any certification.

CROSS UK is a confidential reporting system which allows professionals working in the built environment to highlight fire and structural safety issues.

The findings are published anonymously with an aim to



Nigel Headford

share lessons learned, create positive change, and improve safety. CAB strongly supports the dissemination of CROSS UK learning to help prevent repeat incidents and improve safety outcomes across the sector.

We welcome this heads-up from CROSS UK and will endeavour to raise awareness of the issue amongst CAB members, and the wider industry.

CROSS UK suggests that incidents of hinge failure and window detachment appear to be on the rise, so it's essential that we take action now to avoid tragedy. □

For more information about CAB visit www.c-a-b.org.uk.
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