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City to impose criminal charges and hefty fines for dangerous facade violations

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New rules passed through the city's [crackdown on dangerous buildings](#) will require landlords pay for more in-depth inspections, and will impose heftier fines on building-owners who don't immediately fix up damaged facades.

The rules won't be the only changes to the way the city handles dangerous facade. The Department of Buildings will soon pursue criminal charges against owners of buildings with

protective sidewalk sheds older than three years because of unsafe facades, [The New York Times](#) reported Thursday. There are about 570 properties that would be caught up in the sweep, according to the paper.

The new mandates, which take effect Feb. 20, are part of the de Blasio administration's response after architect Erica Tishman was [killed by falling terra cotta](#) from a building near Times Square in December.

The Department of Buildings immediately required all buildings with active facade violations to install protective sidewalk sheds and, after a one-month review process, published the new rules this week.

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The rules govern the city's facade inspection program, which requires owners of buildings six stories and taller to inspect the facades of their buildings every five years. Several of the changes appear aimed at landlords who leave [sidewalk sheds up for years at a time](#), rather than pay for required repairs to their building's facade.

A building owner now has 60 days to repair a facade deemed unsafe by inspectors. After that, they could be hit with fines up to \$1,000 per month, plus a new monthly fine of \$10 per foot of sidewalk shed they leave in front of their building. The fee for the sidewalk shed increases each year to reach \$40 per linear foot after five years.

Craig Hargrove, a senior vice president and director of Hoffman Architects, said the fees aren't the only way the new rules could cost building owners.

For one, the new rules will require landlords hire engineers to conduct facade inspections that are more in-depth than previously required.

On any part of a building's exterior that faces a public area, such as sidewalk or plaza, inspectors now must do a close-up facade inspection every 60 feet. The previous policy required only a "representative sample" of exterior walls, with a minimum of one direct sample.

"Clearly the rule has been changed to protect the public, and that should be the main—and, many would argue, only—priority," Hargrove said. "But it is going to have a significant cost impact to owners."

That's because each of those up-close inspections—what engineers refer to as "drops"—require suspending scaffolding from the roof or hoisting inspectors by motorized lift. That's a more significant cost than observing from the street.

The new rules also require more experienced inspectors. Engineer or architects must now have seven years of experience working with buildings six stories or taller before they are allowed to file a facade inspection report.

"The gravity of this is significant enough that they're trying to make sure that anyone looking at facades really understands how to properly diagnose the conditions," Hargrove said.

Other rule changes require more inspections of cavities within facades and increase the number of photographs inspectors must submit with an inspection. Landlords who miss the deadline for filing a five-year inspection report will be hit a with \$5,000 fine, up from \$1,000 under the previous rules.

Inline Play

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