

Believe it or not: Hanging by the tiles!

“What is the most bizarre case you’ve ever encountered?”

This is the kind of question that only pros in any field get asked as a presumed mark of their hard-won expertise.

ACRAWord thought to put the question to ACRA members about their field.

The responses, which could fill a casebook of *Believe It or Nots*, make fascinating reading.

Hang by the tiles

Our first case (of believe-it-or-not consequences of cover-ups) involved a heritage building in Double Bay.

For chilling effect, put yourself in the place of tiling contractors hard at work on a balcony three floors up, removing its old tiles ready for re-tiling. Imagine how you would feel on returning after a smoko to resume work only **to find the balcony you had been standing on moments earlier gone:** a pile of rubble below where it had been.

An ACRA consultant member called in to investigate found that a major cause was that **the top steel in the reo was completely corroded through** where the curved balcony met the facade.

In effect, a structure designed to span had been hanging in cantilever for who knows how long.

The balcony had been **literally hanging by the tiling.** And the tiling had been the literal “cover-up” for poor building practices that had failed to ensure adequate concrete cover to the reo. Worse was the discovery that **none of the top steel reo had survived the years in any of the balconies.**

Certainly a catastrophe waiting to happen that must have sent shivers up the spines of the residents who had, over the years,



FIX SHOWS HOW BIG THE FAILURE

lingered on their balconies without a thought that they could at any moment be sent crashing to the ground amongst a heap of rubble.

Moral #1

Don’t assume it can’t happen to you. Get an ACRA consultant member to do a condition survey to ensure your structures are sound as insurance against a disaster too scary to contemplate.

This fix

In this case, the owners sought from their ACRA consultant an alternative to completely demolishing and reconstructing the balconies.

They were given a less costly and disruptive option, which involved an ACRA contractor member replacing the corroded reo in the band beam and patch repairs to the slab soffit, then bonding carbon fibre reinforcement to the top surface of the slab to strengthen its cantilevered section. Membrane coatings now keep out the elements.

The repair strategy has made the balconies in this building structurally sound for many years to come.

Moral #2

If you fail to heed Moral #1 and suffer a “believe-it-or-not” failure as a consequence, **count on ACRA consultants, contractors and materials supply members to come up with the most cost-effective remedy.**

Not surprisingly this case had everyone shaking heads in disbelief from start to finish—and even now. ■