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# Renovation can kill you

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## MiD DAY lists some dos and don'ts you should follow to prevent another Laxmi Chhaya

BMC sources say Laxmi Chhaya's basic framework was modified, which led to the crash. Structural consultant Shailesh Mahimtura of Mahimtura Consultants lists these DON'Ts.

- If your building is not designed for a terrace garden, don't make one. A terrace garden is the load of one additional floor. Gravel for the garden would add more load.
- Make space for toilets. If your bedroom does not have an attached toilet, don't turn the balcony into a toilet. Also, do not make a kitchen into a bedroom and the toilet into a kitchen.
- Apartment rooms are designed for specific purposes and changing the basic layout could be dangerous.
- If you want to go for concealed wiring, make sure you are not drilling holes in the beams. Same goes for the split air conditioners, do not dig holes in columns and beams for wiring.
- Do not create extra rooms by building additional walls or breaking some. If you have a two-bedroom house, making it three bedrooms by building another wall is a complete no. If you want, you can create wooden or synthetic partition walls.
- Do not touch the columns, slabs and beams of the building under any circumstances. They are the elements, which transmit, through compression, the weight of the building above to other structural elements below.
- Do not rely on interior designers who sacrifice safety under the pretext of aesthetics. They may suggest that a particular column or beam is looking ugly and is better removed. This is unsafe.
- Ground floor is where the maximum load of the building is. Residents living there should make sure that if any modification is inevitable, including that of walls, a structural engineer should be consulted.

- Simple plastering cannot replace concrete for holes or cracks in walls or beams and columns. If there is any damage, consult a structural engineer.
- Mezzanine floors are dangerous for older buildings.

A three-storey building could actually become a six-storey, which means twice the load. False ceilings made out of Plaster of Paris are okay.

**Expertspeak**

Mumbai's humid climate and sulphur dioxide leads to corrosion of steel inside beams and columns. So they have to be checked periodically. Plus some interior designers compromise on safety. The structural audit for societies, which is mandatory, is often not done.

— **Shailesh Mahimtura**

According to model by-laws, every building above 30 years of age has to be structurally audited every three years, a building between 15 to 30 years of age every five years. But there's no mechanism to check whether housing societies are complying with the by-laws.

— **Advocate Vinod Sampat, expert in co-operative law**

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