

## Conversion work 'factor in collapse'

Government may take legal action over effort to subdivide unit in 61-year-old block in Hung Hom

Work to subdivide a self-contained flat was one of the factors that triggered the partial collapse of a 61-year-old tenement block in Kowloon, according to an investigation by the Buildings Department.

The authority has not ruled out taking legal action if it finds evidence that the conversion, which contributed to a 44 per cent increase in weight, violated building regulations.

The subdivided balcony flat on the first floor of 50 Gillies Avenue South in Hung Hom gave way in the early hours of June 21 after torrential rain.

No one was injured, but at least 22 residents had to move out of the six-storey building because of structural safety concerns.

The collapse exposed the interior of the subdivided flat, with a bunk bed dangling precariously from the edge, while furniture and other household items were thrown on to the street.

The department's investigation report, released yesterday, concluded that there were four main factors that contributed to the collapse - weaker concrete strength, corrosion of steel reinforcement bars, an increase in loading and a lack of maintenance.

An extra two inches of floor finishing was added to bring the balcony level with the interior floor, while almost three inches of cement was added to the wall, adding to the flat's weight.

Kenny Tse Chi-kin, vice-chairman of the [\*Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors\*](#)' building surveying division, said that a 44 per cent increase in dead load was "significant".

"It can become dangerous when landlords or tenants do not find authorised personnel to help them calculate whether the renovation work will exceed the maximum loading designed for the building," Tse said.

He added that regular maintenance and check-ups would reduce a building's ageing process.

The report added that concrete strength had declined by 53 per cent compared to its original design, while cracks in the walls and rusty reinforcement bars showed the building had not been properly maintained.

The incident reignited concern over the structural safety of decaying walk-up flats. About 6,000 buildings in the city are at least half a century old.

While the investigation showed there were clear signs of overloading, authorities may run into difficulties in prosecuting those responsible, City University associate professor Simon Yau Yung said.

"It can be difficult for the department to try to identify whether it was the landlord or the tenant who carried out conversion works," said Yau, who specialises in research on unauthorised building

work.

The department asked the owners to submit remedial proposals and carry out repair work.

Henderson Land, one of the major owners of the building, confirmed it had appointed an authorised person to follow up on building inspection notices.

A Henderson Land spokeswoman declined to comment on possible remedial work.

## HOUSING

# CONVERSION WORK 'FACTOR IN COLLAPSE'

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