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'MINOR DEFECTS COMMON IN NEW FLATS'

RESIDENTS IN DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTS - FROM PRIVATE AND EXECUTIVE CONDOS TO HDB FLATS - HAVE COMPLAINED OF DEFECTS IN THEIR OFF-THE-PLAN HOMES. REPORTS BY KHAIRIYAH AMIRAH MD RAMTHAN (KHAIMR@SPH.COM.SG)


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Jul 26, 2015 6:00am

BY KHAIRIYAH AMIRAH MD RAMTHAN

Building defects in new projects have been making the news recently, prompting the question: Are standards slipping?

Mr Lee Kuan Yew reading the Proclamatio...
He did not have time to announce Singapore's separation from Malaysia on Aug 9, 1965, as there were "too many other things to do". That's why an announcer read the



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'Minor defects common in new flats' | The New Paper

Not for HDB flats at least, according to Building and Construction Authority numbers.

The proportion of homes with defects has gone up amid the higher number of homes built and completed compared to previous years.

"New units bought directly from developer would have some minor defects," says DTZ Property Network vice-president Joanna Lam.

The defects include ceiling or wall water leakage, broken glasses and cracks on walls.

Residents of million-dollar apartments at Seaview Condominium, RiverParc Residence, The [Sail@Marina](#) Bay and Sentosa's The Coast recently complained about a range of defects including peeling paint, rusty staircases and a burst underground water pipe.

There is a one-year warranty period for private properties and HDB flats. This means developers have the legal responsibility to fix any defects found in the properties for 12 months after the property is obtained by the owner.

Ms Lam adds: "Minor defects are common, that is why developers give a one-year warranty. So, what owners should do is test all the electrical appliances, and check gas pipes and walls for leakage."

But not everything can be resolved within the 12 months.

Residents were allowed to move into their units at The Sail from July 2008, but they said they continued to have problems.

Part of the problem, say real estate agents, is that new homes here are often bought off the plan - buyers see only a floor plan, model and glitzy showflat that is often dressed up with few walls and missing a ceiling.

When they get the keys to their new homes, some find that the homes don't match their expectations in terms of quality.

Such defects can result in residents and private estates' Management Corporation Strata Title filing civil lawsuits against developers.

FLEXIBILITY

Property investment blogger and founder of Property Club Singapore, Ms Vina Ip, says: "One reason why first-time buyers like to buy off-plan properties is the flexibility of the payment scheme.

"After putting down a deposit at the sales gallery, buyers need to pay the downpayment to exercise the option only in eight weeks' time. After that, they can follow a payment plan according to the building progress of the project.

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"Except the 12-month defect liability period, there is no law protecting the home buyers when they find sub-standard fittings, furnishings, fixtures and building materials in their new homes."

But sometimes a buyer has no choice but to buy a new flat off the plan.

Buyers should do prior research on the developer to ensure they do not have a history of building properties with defects, says Mr Seah Seng Choon, executive director for Consumers Association of Singapore (Case).

He adds: "Home owners should inspect the flat carefully after getting their keys and record all defects. For flats, the defects should then be reported to the respective Building Service Centre within the one-year defects liability period."

"Before signing any contracts, it is crucial for the consumer to do research, including researching on the developer," adds Ms Ip.

"When evaluating a developer, it is important to look for three things: experience, reputation and attitude."

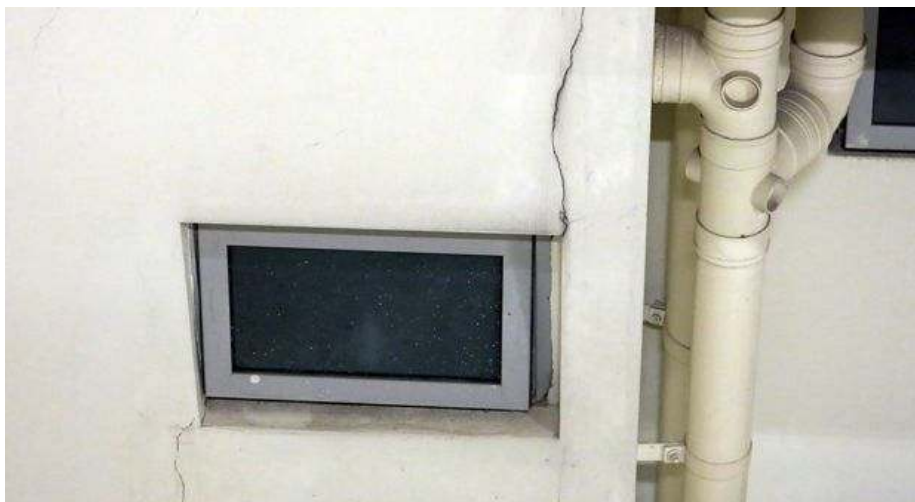
And not just location, location, location.

Some buyers have taken to hiring property inspectors like Inspect First.

A spokesman for the independent property inspection specialist says: "We check the properties to see if the construction work done is up to industry standards. We also check for three main defects: architectural, electrical and mechanical works, and plumbing."

"Most of the time, clients call in because they are worried for their safety. So, for minor defects, we try to reassure these home owners that there are no major structural faults that can endanger them."

New problems emerge after warranty expired



DEFECTS: Cracks in the wall PHOTO COURTESY OF CELINE CHENG

TAXI REVERSES INTO HDB FLAT, KNOCKING DOWN WALL



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DEFECTS: Scratches on wardrobe door PHOTO COURTESY OF CELINE CHENG



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DEFECTS: Bubbles on surface of wash basin PHOTO COURTESY OF CELINE CHENG



DEFECTS: Cracks in parquet floor. PHOTO COURTESY OF CELINE CHENG

Senior trade finance executive Celine Cheng, 36, says she was taken aback by the defects in her Design, Build and Sell Scheme (DBSS) flat at The Premiere @ Tampines, which she moved into six years ago.

"We had cracked parquet floor, scratched tiles and wardrobes, leaky toilets, cracked walls and non-waterproof yard. When it rains, water seeps through the walls, wetting the corridor and front doors."

'Minor defects common in new flats' | The New Paper

After collecting her keys, she discovered a few problems but the DBSS developer addressed these defects at no expense as the new home was still covered by a one-year warranty.

But other problems emerged.

She says: "Recently, we had tiny worms crawl up the kitchen pipes. The pipes are mouldy and the waterproof material is worn out.

"We are a tad disappointed with the work, but we are thankful that our defects are not as bad as those in Central 8."

CENTRAL 8

In 2011, residents of Central 8, another DBSS project in Tampines, complained about various defects in their brand new units, including burst water pipes, choked toilets, faulty balcony locks and uneven floor tiles.

Madam Mary Lee, a 36-year-old project manager who lives in a Build-To-Order flat in Punggol, says: "Our HDB defects were manageable and we are overall pleased with our unit.

"But one of our windows is leaky and the floor tiles are uneven. The parquet floor and toilet bowls also have some scratches."

Other recent cases

THE SEAVIEW CONDOMINIUM

Residents filed a civil suit in 2011 against the developer, main contractor, architecture firm, and mechanical and electrical firm.

They claimed they experienced the alleged defects in the estate since 2008 and are seeking \$32 million in compensation for alleged defects including leaky windows, sewage problems, swimming pool tiles displacement and a lightning rod that was installed incorrectly, resulting in concrete blocks falling when lightning strikes.

PUNGGOL WATERWAY

During a downpour on July 14, the residents of the Build-To-Order flats said water seeped into their flats from their closed windows and balcony doors, leaving their home interiors water-damaged.

They also complained that the fire alarms would go off early in the morning.

PASIR RIS ONE

Last month, residents of the Design, Build and Sell Scheme project highlighted issues such as popping tiles, stained doors and cracked window panes.

They also complained about the narrow common corridors, which they said are 1.17m wide - narrower than the minimum width of 1.2m as stated in the fire safety guidelines by the Singapore Civil Defence Force.

Tips for buying units off the plan

Mr Ismail Gafoor, CEO of PropNex

- Your unit will not be an exact replica of the showflat.
- Examine the floor plan, visualise and interpret it - this helps in planning for furniture.
- Location of the sales gallery may not be the actual location of the property. You won't know if your view is blocked by other buildings just by looking at the floor plan and the sales gallery.
- Drive around the estate and look at the surroundings to know the neighbourhood and the view.

Ms Vina Ip, founder of Property Club Singapore

- What you see is not what you get. You are expected to imagine what you are buying from an artist's perspective.
- Check with relevant government departments to confirm the scale and timeline of any future development in the area.

Mr Edmund Ee, associate division director of PropNex Realty and co-founder of [PropertyNet.SG](#)

- Ignore all the interior design you see in the sales gallery.
- Imagine your home whitewashed and with four walls.
- Look at the site plan. Units close to the bin centre tend to have a foul smell.

By the numbers

More units completed over the years

2008: 12,335 completed, including 1,769 public housing units

2014: 51,598 completed, including 28,300 public housing units

2015: Projected 50,796 units, including 26,000 public housing units

Builders getting better scores*

2003: 79 out of 100

2014: 89 out of 100

*Based on Building and Construction Authority's Construction Quality Assessment System score.

A score out of 100 is given based on assessment of three components: structural, architectural and mechanical, and electrical works.

TYPICAL FAULTS

- About 75 per cent relate to defects such as surface imperfections, which include hairline cracks on walls, scratches on timber floor and uneven tile joints
- 25 per cent relate to issues such as low water pressure and paint stains

TAGS: HOUSING, HDB, BTO FLATS, DEFECTS, PROPERTY



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