

Investigation Continues Into 12 Deaths Due To Berkeley Balcony Collapse

Six people killed, while seven others sustained serious injuries when the packed balcony sheared off, plunging the victims to the sidewalk below.



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BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES, July 14, 2015 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Authorities have turned to helping victims and families, and investigation the cause, after a [balcony collapsed](#) last week killing six people in Berkeley. The three men and three women killed were all current or recent college students; all but one were Irish nationals in Berkeley for summer studies. Seven other summer visitors sustained serious injuries when the packed balcony sheared off, plunging the victims to the sidewalk below.



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The accident happened at Library Gardens, 2020 Kittredge Street, a five-story complex with at least 175 units on a side street between the Berkeley Public Library and Berkeley High School. The complex is just west of Shattuck Avenue, about three blocks from the west perimeter of the UC Berkeley campus.

City records show the Library Gardens apartments were proposed as a mixed-use development in 2000. It was under construction from 2005 to 2007, according to a city official,

with its final inspection in January 2007. The property has underground parking, 3,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor and 8,903 square feet of shared open space.

Police said 13 people were on the balcony when its collapse was reported at 12:42 a.m. "We're still looking into what happened," both at the party and with the structure of the balcony, said city spokesman Matthai Chakko. As a precaution, the city barred use of three similar balconies on the property.

The building was erected under 1998 building codes, and the balcony should have withstood up to 60 pounds per square foot, according to the city. But one expert suggested that water seeping into the horizontal support beams could have caused dry rot, contributing to the collapse.

"It appears to be a classic case of dry rot, meaning water intruded into the building [and] rotted the wood" that supported the balcony, said Gene St. Onge, a civil and structural engineer in Oakland. With more than a dozen people on the balcony, "It gave way. It didn't have enough residual strength, and it failed."

St. Onge said photos he reviewed Tuesday morning, showing the broken wooden beams protruding from the building that once held up the balcony, reveal what clearly looks like signs of dry rot. A

structural failure without any dry rot would have looked different, St. Onge said. The balcony should have been able to support the weight of 13 or 14 people, he added.

On June 18, 2015 [BBC News](#) for the US and Canada reported that “an initial investigation found that the balcony support's wooden beams may not have been sealed properly at the time of construction” quoting Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates. “More than likely, it was caused by rain and water damage,” Mr. Bates said.

“The balcony, built with a timber structure, was susceptible to moisture and rainwater,” said UC Berkeley civil engineering professor Abolhassan Astaheh-Asl on June 22, 2015, after visiting the accident site. [Link: <http://www.dailycal.org/2015/06/17/experts-say-balcony-collapse-that-killed-6-likely-due-to-dry-rot/>]

Bates called the incident “a wake-up call” and noted that 13 buildings are under construction in the city.

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