

Elliot Lake mall collapse may change rules for engineers

Professional Engineers of Ontario makes recommendations at public inquiry into Elliot Lake tragedy

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The deadly mall roof collapse in Elliot Lake may change the way engineers work in the province of Ontario.

The inquiry investigating the roof collapse at the Algo Centre Mall last summer — which killed two people — has received a 28-page document with recommendations from the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario (PEO)



All debris from the collapsed mall has been removed from the site in downtown Elliot Lake. (Yvon Theriault/Radio-Canada)

"The PEO hopes that the regulation of professional engineering, professional engineering in Ontario, and the regulation and protection of existing structures such as the mall will be improved such that the terrible events of last year will not be repeated," Leah Price, counsel for the PEO, told the inquiry Tuesday.

Over the 30-plus year history, many different engineers examined the leaky Algo Centre Mall. That led to questions at the inquiry as to how structural problems inside the leaky building could have been missed.

Lawyer Joseph Bisceglia represents an engineer who signed off on another engineer's inspection of the mall just weeks before the collapse.

"What occurred at the Algo Centre Mall brings forth the fact that in Ontario, there are no specific guidelines or requirements as to what should be included in a building condition assessment," he told the inquiry.

Call for change

In its submission, the PEO agrees that should change.

The regulatory body says there should be more guidelines for structural inspections so engineers are not limited in their inspection by terms set out by building owners.

The PEO recommends those reports be called "structural adequacy reports". They could include a long list of potential requirements, such as a timeframe for any suggested repairs, and a section on any limitations or restrictions placed on the engineers' work.

The PEO also recommends that such reports be provided to the municipality -- making them available to any future owners, engineers, or the public.

Create specialist certification

In its submission to the public inquiry, the PEO also recommends the creation of a specialist certification for engineers carrying out structural inspections.



Justice Paul Belanger is head of the commission leading the inquiry into the fatal roof collapse at the Algo Centre Mall in Elliot Lake, which happened on June 23, 2012. (Yvon Theriault/Radio-Canada)

It notes this was put into practice more than a decade ago in B.C. following a roof collapse at a Burnaby supermarket. The PEO submission explains how a Designated Structural Engineer in B.C. has more qualifications and has completed specified examinations.

"A structural engineering specialist would be the person who would take responsibility for the structural adequacy reports that are to be mandated, and the contents of which are to be mandated, in accordance with these recommendations," Price said.

Commissioner Paul Belanger thanked the PEO for the submission.

The inquiry will continue to hear witnesses in Elliot Lake through October. Then Commissioner Belanger will write his report about what happened and will make recommendations.

The public inquiry was established in July, 2012 by the Ontario government and has been underway in Elliot Lake since March.

It was created to report on events surrounding the mall roof collapse on June 23, 2012, the deaths of Lucie Aylwin and Doloris Perizzolo, the injuries to others and the emergency management and response.

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