Investing in safe access & cleaning systems

Façade access system or façade cleaning system that has evolved from access engineering and access equipment came to the fore in the late 90s. Ever since, a lot of buildings requiring exterior façades access system with different configurations have come up. And, consequently the need for façade cleaning systems. In the process, from then to now, investment in safe and proper access and cleaning systems has been compromised leading to irrevocable eventualities.

Safe Equipment

Safety plays a primary role in design, engineering and the manufacture of all kinds of equipment. There are well defined safety norms/rules and they are applicable to façade cleaners and cleaning systems as well. For any equipment supplied, safety has to be factored in from the drawing board stage. The process has to be followed through manufacturing till it is load tested at site with all safety features, including reaction loads. Toppling load safety factor is as high as three times. For suspension ropes/cables safety factor, we consider 10 times the normal load factor.

A secure facade cleaning system will never jeopardize the safety of façade cleaners; it complements safe working practice. If the façade cleaning equipment is faulty or improper, even the best façade cleaner in the world cannot avert an accident. Improper equipment or unsafe façade cleaning system, even with ample safety precautions cannot undo the risk of accident.

Hence, the equipment should be foolproof and capable of dealing with human error of the operatives. Tying ropes unplanned at the terrace level for Spider Kit, will serve only a temporary purpose. This short cut method is highly unsafe and costly too in the long run, as it causes severe and irreparable damage to the façade itself.

The type of safety norm will depend upon the kind of façade cleaning system that is being deployed and the automation in place. Some of the important factors include safe working load test and overload test to be carried out immediately after commissioning and thereafter once in year. Façade cleaner must be well trained and should know how to operate the system; this is the basic criteria. The façade cleaner should be made aware of precautionary

"We have been following a zero accident policy and maintaining this consistently since we came into the business."

– Siraj Dalvi
Managing Director
Simple Engineering Solutions, Mumbai

measures in case of emergency. If there is no self-rescue system built in, then he/she must not use the system.

There must be a provision of secondary safety rope. Safety brake is an essential part of operation. Fall arrester must be in working condition.

These are seldom part of maintenance contract, the reason being little or no awareness on the customer side. Unfortunately, facade cleaning contractors take advantage of this situation so as to make a fast buck out of it. In the absence of Indian standards, we follow European and American standards. These countries have been into façade cleaning systems for more than five decades. The safety norms are very stringent.

Safe Training

Façade cleaning is a highly skilled but at the same time a high-risk job. Workers must be trained extensively offsite and onsite before they are assigned to the actual cleaning job. Skill upgradation thereafter should be a regular practice.

The concerned property/facility manager and the supervisor must ensure that safety norms are implemented on a day-to-day basis. There should be surprise checks and feedback mechanism and safety audits conducted annually. Involvement of third party in audit and professional advice is essential. In India, unless it is a statutory requirement or legislation, nothing will fall in place.

There is tremendous potential for façade equipment and façade cleaning in India and we see an exponential growth. Even three-tier or four-tier cities will have exterior façade maintenance requirement in the near future. However, it needs to be seen how many of these structures go for a proper façade cleaning system. ■