Third Edition

G.BATISTA's ONE-HOUR GUIDE TO Building Recertifications and Milestone Inspections

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IN SOUTH FLORIDA

WHAT IS A BUILDING RECERTIFICATION?

WHAT IS A MILESTONE INSPECTION?

What are the steps to take?

p. 7-11

How not to be taken advantage of

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Just ask G. BATISTA

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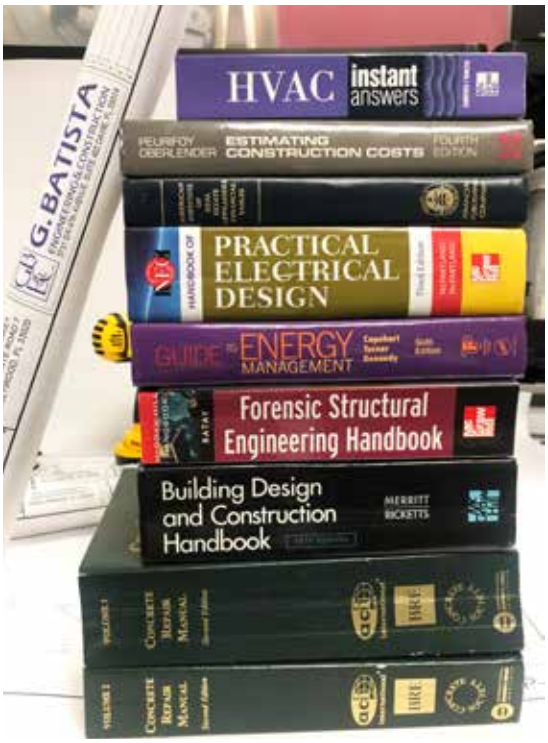
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DID YOU KNOW?

Mr. Batista is one of the leading engineers in South Florida with over 30 years of experience in both engineering and construction.



For over 30 years, Mr. Batista has been a Licensed Professional Engineer and Licensed General Contractor in multiple states and is a well-respected member of the concrete construction and repair industry. Mr. Batista sat on the Broward County Board of Unsafe Structures and has been Director of the Board of the largest Hispanic Professional Engineering Association in the United States and has won serveral professional awards and recognitions.

In the year 2000, Mr. Batista began Real Estate Engineering, LLC and is the President of G. Batista Engineering and Construction, a prominent Engineering and Concrete Repair contracting company with multiple locations.

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INTRODUCTION (IMPORTANT TO READ)

Congratulations! You are well on your way to properly getting your Building recertification inspection or your milestone inspection completed. As an engineer and contractor who has performed literally thousands of inspections, I can categorically tell you that it is critical that you understand the importance of doing these inspections correctly since these inspections are the very first step of what can be a very costly repair process for your property. And if you start out on the wrong foot, chances are that you will end up on the wrong foot. Let me explain:

The Building Recertification and Milestone inspections are inspections that are mandated by Florida Statute (and we will get into more detail in the coming chapters) and as such, you will be required to pay for and manage any repairs as a consequence of these inspections. If you hire the wrong architect, engineer, consultant, contractor, project manager, etc., you will likely be led wrongly and the consequences could be dire. I have always prided myself as a professional that goes out of his way to teach the public and hence the "Ask G. Batista" brand that I have created. I have written this guide with the solid belief that a well-educated and informed consumer is the best client particularly in the aftermath of the Champlain Towers Collapse. It is this belief that has been the bedrock of my business and reputation… and the secret of my success.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Milestone Inspection is a statewide inspection that concentrates on the structural components of a building. As of the writing of this guide, only Dade and Broward counties need to have the electrical systems inspected as part of the Milestone Inspection process (similar to the what the 40 Year Recertification required).

I am proud of all of the Guides that I have authored, but this one is the one that I am most gratified with. Why? Because the recertification process could potentially involve the whole gamut of processes and issues fundamental to the inspection, engineering, permitting, and construction industry. Each one of these industries is a complicated in of itself, particularly in South Florida.

So once again "Congratulations" on taking the first step to a successful 40 Year Recertification process.

SO, WHAT IS A BUILDING RECERTIFICATION/ MILESTONE INSPECTION?

The Building recertification and milestone inspection are inspections required by law when a building turns a certain age and that will be repeated every 10 years thereafter. Being, at heart, a safety inspection, they're designed to protect people from building failures. In other words, it's an inspection designed to make sure the building isn't going to collapse and that the associated systems are safe for the property's occupants.

Who has to do them? The simple answer is: Building Owners

If you're the owner of a building in Florida that is 25 years old or older, you're probably going to have to have an inspection done once your building comes of age and every 10-year anniversary thereafter.

If you own a building in Broward or Miami-Dade and none of the above exemptions apply to you, then you are responsible for having it done. Yes, I know, building owners, another thing to add on top of the million other responsibilities that come with owning and maintaining a building. It may well be another pain in the rear but it is an important, although basic, inspection that helps to inform you of the condition of your building for the most important reasons: the people who use it.

Laws and rules are changing. Therefore, the specific administrative rules for doing a Building recertification and/or milestone inspection could vary slightly for a given City or County. It is recommended that the Owner also obtain guidance from the City or County where you received your notice from. Just call your local Building Department.

The milestone/recertification inspection is an excellent tool that can be used to prevent and anticipate costly repairs to your building. It allows you to plan and budget for work or maintenance, making it more manageable as opposed to a more costly emergency that comes out of the blue.

Why is this a law? A bit of history

On August 5, 1974, a building located at 1201 NE 2nd Avenue in Miami, collapsed killing seven people and injuring another sixteen. The building was leased by the Federal government and housed the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The structure was over 50 years old and had undergone some renovations in 1971 prior to the DEA occupying the building later that year. Permitted work to structural columns was done in 1971, but a non-permitted concrete slab that was poured on the roof of the building, sometime in the same year, may have been partially to blame for the collapse. The DEA parked cars (seized for forfeiture) on the roof. There were 57 vehicles parked on the roof at the time of the collapse. The City of Miami last inspected the building in 1971 during renovations made before the DEA moved in. The Federal government also inspected the building before leasing it to the DEA. In the aftermath of the collapse, fingers were pointed in all directions as to who was responsible for making sure that the building was safe. Was it the owner? Was it the tenant (in this case the Federal government)? Or was it the City's Building Official? At the time of the tragedy, the City of Miami had a requirement that all buildings be inspected annually, but everyone knew that

the City didn't have enough inspectors to comply with this annual requirement. And news reports at the time, questioned whether City building inspectors had the technical expertise to conduct the type of inspections needed to ensure structural safety. During this same time, Herbert M. Schwartz, the President of the Miami Chapter of the Florida Engineering Society, voiced his observations that the DEA building was structurally unsound and that he was surprised that it held up as long as it did. Mr. Schwartz, a consultant to the Metro Board of Rules and Appeals, was retained by the County to study deterioration of the Courthouse. He publicly proposed a new requirement that every building over 25 years old must undergo a structural inspection, to include structural testing, in order to recertify the building's Certificate of Occupancy. Mr. Schwartz also proposed that these inspections and attestations as to safety be performed by private engineering firms, as the governmental agencies lacked the resources. By next spring, an ordinance was drafted and first presented to the Metro Board of Rules and Appeals. Thereafter, it went before the Board of County Commissioners on March 18, 1975, where it was deferred for 30 days to allow other interested parties to provide input on the proposed legislation. Adjustments were made to the proposed legislation and a Recommended Minimum Procedural Guidelines for Building Recertification (Minimum Procedural Guidelines) was prepared by Mr. Schwartz in his consulting capacity to the Metro Board of Rules and Appeals. These Minimum Procedural Guidelines accompanied the amended ordinance that was presented to the Board for its consideration on May 21, 1975.

On May 21, 1975, the Board adopted and passed Ordinance No. 75-34, amending the South Florida Building Code by requiring that all buildings, except single family residences, duplexes and minor structures, 40 years old or older be recertified as to their structural safety. Subsequent recertifications are required at ten (10) year intervals. The responsibility to conduct the structural inspection fell on the building's owner (that's you). The owner was also responsible for furnishing a written report "prepared by a Professional Engineer or Architect registered in the State of Florida, certifying that each such building or structure is structurally safe, or has been made structurally safe" that conforms with the Minimum Procedural Guidelines. If the inspection shows that repairs were needed to gain recertification, the owner would be given 150 days from the date of the Notice of Required Inspection to complete those repairs.

This was a mandatory ordinance applicable to all qualified buildings within the County and it was made effective immediately but owners were given one year from the effective date to comply. In 1992, the Board passed Ordinance 92-01, which among many amendments to the South Florida Building Code, added the requirement of an electrical inspection to the 40-year recertification requirement.

In 2000, the State of Florida adopted a Uniform Building Code for the entire state, known as the Florida Building Code, incorporating most of the South Florida Building Code. However, Section 104.9 of the South Florida Building Code (the 40/50 year recertification requirement) was not adopted as a mandatory requirement of the new Florida Building Code. Like most state regulations, counties can maintain regulations that are stricter than the state guidelines, which the Board decided it would do when it elected to keep its 40/50 year recertification requirement—the only county to do so until 2006, when Broward County added the recertification requirement to its regulations. The Miami-Dade County requirement can be found in Section 8-11 Existing Buildings, subsection (f) Recertification of buildings and components, of the Code of Miami-Dade County.

Then, in the aftermath of the Champlain Tour Collapes on June 24, 2021, local and state government made strides to not only understand how this tragedy could have occurred, but to strengthen existing laws and regulations to keep this from ever occurring again.

In May 2022, the Florida Legislature approved Senate Bill 4-D, introducing new stipulations for condominiums and co-op buildings with a height of three stories or more. This bill implements a comprehensive Milestone inspection program across the state, mandating that condominium and cooperative associations carry out crucial structural assessments and execute structural integrity reserve analyses. These measures are in place to guarantee the continued safety and viability of condominium and cooperative structures. In the Milestone Inspections(formerly known as a 40-Year Recertification Inspection), there are 2 phases that we will get into in more detail later in this guide.

WHY ARE THE BUILDING RECERTIFICATIONS/ MILESTONE INSPECTIONS SO IMPORTANT?

The simple answer is: Safety. And let's also not forget that it's also a lot less expensive keeping things safe than it is dealing with the ramifications of an incident where unsafe building conditions led to someone getting hurt. And let's face it, sometimes people do things that they shouldn't when it comes to construction, repairs, and building maintenance. Maybe the building's previous owner liked to cut corners and costs, and was willing to have work done without a permit. It's wrong and it's unsafe. In the worst case scenarios, it can get people killed. It may be a pain to have to go through the process of getting a permit but it's for everyone's safety. And these recertifications may well save you by pointing out a small problem before it turns into a catastrophe.

Buildings get old. Over time things naturally break down due to normal wear and tear. These building inspections are the way to make sure the buildings structural "bones" are holding up and that the electrical "blood flow" is working as it should.

WHAT ARE THE PARTS OF A BUILDING RECERTIFICATION/MILESTONE INSPECTION?

(CURRENTLY FOR DADE AND BROWARD COUNTIES ONLY)

The Florida Legislature has required the implementation of a "Milestone Inspection" which in many ways is similar to what was formerly known as a 40 Year Recertification. The main reason why it is no longer called a 40 Year Recertification is because the requirements for inspection is no longer when the building turns 40 years, but is now 25 or 30 years depending on the buildings proximity to the ocean. As of the writing of this guide, this Milestone inspection (currently In Broward and Dade Counties only) must include not only a structural inspection, but also contain a comprehensive electrical system review including a parking lot. Outside of South Florida, the new law does not require (as of the writing of this guide) the electrical inspection.

The Structural portion focuses on the main structural components of the building such as masonry and/or bearing walls to see if there are major cracks, spalling, corroded rebar, etc. It also focuses on the condition of the roof and floor systems, steel, concrete, or wood framing systems. Basically the "skeleton" of what holds the building up. The Electrical portion focuses on the main electrical components in the building such as amperage, fuses, breakers, the condition of meter rooms, electrical panels, gutters, grounding, wiring methods and emergency lighting, to name a few.

We all know that dark areas at night can be a hazard. There are many things that can happen in open parking lots such as car accidents, muggings, and robberies. It is for this reason that Miami-Dade County has required that parking lots contain a certain minimum amount of lighting. It all comes down to a safety issue. We all want to be safe.

An illumination study is an analysis of the lighting levels at the parking areas of your property. At its most fundamental, your professional that you hire for your 40-year recertification will walk around the parking lot and measure the light levels of all parking areas. A light meter is used to measure the levels and at no time should the lighting levels be less than 1 foot-candle per square foot. After the inspection, your professional should be able to let you know, through a written report, the areas where the lighting needs to improve.

The guardrail portion of the inspection report is quite straightforward. It ensures that if the parking lot is next to a body of water like a lake or canal, that there are guardrails (like the ones you see on the highway) in place to prevent people from accidentally driving into the water.

If you happen to fail the illumination test due to poor lighting, you must find a solution that will increase the lighting level to meet with the County's code. In simplest terms, you have to

add more lighting and/or improve on what you already have. Sometimes it's as easy as making sure all of your lamp/bulbs are in working order. Sometimes it calls for replacing the lamps with more powerful versions. And of course, there is always the option of adding more lights in your parking lot. Another easy but useful course of action is to make sure that your lighting fixtures are not being partially blocked by bushes or tree branches. Clear away any excess foliage to ensure the best readings possible.

If your failure is due to lack of guardrail structure, you'll want to get some installed as quickly as possible. The last thing you want as a responsible building owner is to have someone make the mistake of thinking they put their car in reverse, but instead put it into gear and run right into the canal. Call a company with experience in installing FDOT(-Florida Dept of Transportation) approved guardrails like the ones you've seen on the highway.

Below you will find the main portions of the property to be inspected. I could have easily "copy and pasted" the actual forms that the inspector uses, but since these could vary slightly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, I decided to just add the basic items to this guide. If you want to know exactly what the form looks like then you will have to contact your Building Department for it, or use the form that came in the mail with the notice to perform the Building Recertification/Milestone Inspection.

BASIC LIST OF ITEMS TO BE CHECKED IN A 40 YEAR RECERTIFICATION

1. Basic Building information:
    a. Address, legal description and other basic information about the property.
    b. General description of the property, Occupancy Classification and its use.
    c. Description of any additions made to the structure.
2. Basic Inspection information:
    a. Date of Notice and date of the inspection.
    b. Qualifications of the inspector.
    c. Information on any special testing that took place.
    d. Supporting data (i.e. pictures and notes).
3. Structural Inspection:
    a. General Alignment (if there are any bulging, deflections, or settlement).
    b. Portions of the building that are showing distress.
    c. Surface conditions such as spalling, cracking and signs of moisture penetration.
    d. Signs of cracks, patching and prior repairs.
    e. Inspection on the CMU (Concrete Masonry Units).
    f. Inspection of the concrete beams, columns, and slabs.
    g. Inspection of the finishes on the concrete (plaster, veneer, paint, etc.).
    h. Investigation into any major cracks on the structure and/or spalling.
    i. Roof inspection.
    j. Flooring system inspection.
    k. Steel frame inspection including elevator sheave beam.
    l. Window inspection (type, anchorage condition, and sealant).
    m. Wood framing condition (type of construction and its condition).
4. Electrical Inspection:
    a. Inspection of the electrical service coming into the building (size of mains, voltage and phasing).
    b. Inspection of the main meter room and/or electrical room (i.e. switchgear, gutters and main panels).
    c. Inspection of other panels throughout the property and associated branch circuits, the wiring, and conduits.
    d. Ensure that the grounding is satisfactory.
    e. Inspect the emergency lighting, egress illumination.
    f. Inspect the exit lighting, emergency generator, and the fire alarm system.
    g. If there is a garage structure or a pool, then it shall also be inspected including the electrical for the equipment.
5. If the property is located in Miami-Dade County, then the inspection shall include:
    a. Ensuring that the parking lot (or garage) has a minimum illumination level.
    b. Ensuring that the parking lot has the proper guard rails in place.
    c. Thermal evaluation of electrical system.

THE BASIC BUILDING RECERTIFICATION/MILESTONE INSPECTION PROCESS (DADE AND BROWARD COUNTIES)

Let's walk through a typical time line that the recertification process normally takes. First things first. Your building has turned or is turning 25 or 30 years old. You get a notice in the mail letting you know just that. The notice from the city your building is in also lets you know that as the owner, you are responsible for having this recertification done AND there are deadlines that have to be met. Please note that these deadlines must be met. Otherwise, the building department can impose fines and take other measures to ensure your compliance.

Typically, when you receive the notice, you'll have 90 days to find an engineer to complete an inspection of the building and submit a report. If your building passes inspection the first time around, that's it. You're done! You won't have to think about it again for ten more years. Now let's say there are some deficiencies that would prevent your structural engineer from giving you a clean report right off the bat. What then? No worries. The failing report is still what you need to turn in to the city/county within those 90 days. It lets them know you aren't just sitting on your laurels. The failing report will indicate what parts of the building (if any) need to be repaired or replaced. This adds time to the clock. The city will now give you up to 180 days to complete the required repairs after which your engineer will prepare a new "clean" report for you to submit. Now let's say that there are extensive repairs that need to be made in order to meet the minimum requirements. Maybe the building is a condo and it's going to take time to collect the assessment from the unit owners, and some more time choosing who is going to do the repairs, etc. It's possible to request an extension from the city. These extensions are usually granted as long as they can see you're working on getting things done and not just resting on your laurels. Your inspector will draft a signed and sealed letter for you to submit your respectful extension request. Do not abuse it if it is granted.

What happens if I don't get the milestone/recertification inspection done? What's the worst that could happen? Well, the short answer is: They knock the building down. Yes, it can get that serious. And rightfully so. This process is for the sake of the safety of the people who use the building. Failure to submit the required Report will eventually result in the issuance of a Civil Violation Notice or ticket without further notice to you. Then they refer the matter to the Unsafe Structures Unit for the initiation of condemnation proceedings. Then there's the fine which can end up being somewhere north of $10,000 plus whatever it cost the department for enforcement once Unsafe Structures begins its process. Do yourself a favor. Avoid the unsafe structure notice of violation. Get it done. No one wants a red sticker plastered to the front of the building telling everyone it's unsafe and that in due time it will be demolished.

Now some of you may be thinking, what if I never get the notice? Out of sight, out of mind, right? Guess again. No news isn't necessarily good news. Even if you have not yet received a 'Notice of Required Inspection' by the code compliance section of your county or city, it is the property owner's responsibility to get it done. In this case ignorance isn't bliss.

What are the Parts of a Milestone Inspection?

Milestone Inspections are required by the passage of Senate Bill 4-D in May 2022. All condominium and co-op buildings that are 3 stories and taller must comply. These Milestone Inspections divided into two Phases. These are as follows:

Milestone Inspections: PHASE 1- In accordance with Florida regulations, a licensed engineer or architect must carry out the essential inspections of condominium and co-op buildings. These inspections involve a thorough visual examination of the building's primary structural components and systems to ensure their integrity and safety. The main objective of these inspections is to identify any significant structural deterioration that could adversely impact the building's overall condition, integrity, or the life-safety of its occupants. The inspection report must document any observed unsafe or dangerous conditions, as well as include a determination of any items that warrant further examination. Additionally, the report should outline the required maintenance, repairs, or replacements of structural components to maintain the building's safety and stability. The inspection report must document any observed unsafe or dangerous conditions, as well as include a determination of any items that warrant further examination. Additionally, the report should outline the required maintenance, repairs, or replacements of structural components to maintain the building's safety and stability.

Milestone Inspections: PHASE 2 In the event that a phase-one inspection, conducted by a Florida-licensed engineer or architect, deems a phase-two milestone inspection necessary, this subsequent inspection may encompass various techniques. These methods can include materials testing, probing, removal of finishes, or non-destructive testing approaches such as ground penetrating radar. The purpose of these inspections is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the building's structural condition. Upon the completion of the phase-two milestone inspection, a detailed report is to be compiled. This report should outline the specific methods and types of inspections performed, as well as clearly indicate if any unsafe or dangerous conditions were observed. Furthermore, the report must identify and describe the extent of any considerable structural deterioration, along with providing recommendations for maintenance, repairs, or replacement of structural components as needed. If the required repairs are not initiated within a year following the submission of the phase-two inspection report, the local municipal authority is obliged to assess whether the building is safe for continued occupancy. By following these procedures and adhering to the established timelines, the safety and well-being of occupants within these buildings can be effectively maintained.

SB 4-D DEADLINES
Phase One Milestone Inspection

Distance from Coastline	Building Age	Deadline
3 miles or less	25 years or older	Dec. 31, 2024, then every 10 years.
	Under 25 years	Dec. 31 of 25th year, then every 10 years.
More than 3 miles	30 years or older	Dec. 31, 2024, then every 10 years.
	Under 30 years	Dec. 31 of 30th year, then every 10 years.
Any	Any	Within 180 days of written notice from a local enforcement agency.

Dates and provisions subject to clarification and updates by the legislature and recommendations of the Florida Building Commission.

The table above shows the deadlines at which the buildings must be reviewed for the Milestone Inspection. As you can see, it depends on the distance from the coastline and the age of the building.

HIRING THE RIGHT PROFESSIONAL

Hiring the right professionals is absolutely key when it comes to the building recertification/milestone inspection. If you aren't careful and jump at the lowest price you find you may end up getting an inspection report that isn't worth the paper it's printed on because it wasn't done by a professional that is legally empowered to do so. I cannot stress this enough. It's rather unfortunate that I still get calls from people who were duped by unscrupulous individuals looking to make a quick buck. The only people who can perform this type of inspection, as well as sign and seal the paperwork that is to be submitted to the city, are licensed Engineers or Architects that are licensed here in the State of Florida. A regular home inspector that you call out when you're buying a house or condo won't do. And even among professionals there are certain things that will set the better ones apart so you can have the confidence that your building is receiving the best analysis of its condition which will save you in the long run.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INSPECTOR BEFORE THEY DO THE INSPECTION

Keep in mind these important questions, and make sure that they're answered completely before hiring and spending your hard earned dollars:

Does this professional carry Errors and Omissions insurance?

Just as citizens should carry automobile insurance in case you are in an accident, inspection professionals should also have insurance to cover them in case they make a mistake. Although it is not required for engineers and architects to carry Errors & Omissions Insurance, it is definitely a red flag if they do not have it since most established and reputable firms do carry at least $1,000,000 of insurance. If they're not responsible enough to carry $1 Million in errors and omission insurance, and they make a mistake which later may result in loss of life or limb or property damage, you as the owner is left to pick up the pieces. My company, G. Batista Engineering and Construction carries $1,000,000. If your inspector says that they have it, you can ask for proof by asking them to provide you with their "insurance binder" which is a document from the insurance company that states the amount of coverage, the name of the insured, as well as other pertinent information.

How many inspections have they done in the past?

While I may certainly appreciate the get up and go of a young professional just starting out in their career, I'd feel much more at ease knowing that the professional I hire has 20 years of experience doing these inspections day in and day out. Here at G. Batista we are happy to say that we have done hundreds of these inspections and reports on numerous types of buildings all over South Florida. We are familiar with the ins and outs of not just the inspection process itself, but as well as each municipality's idiosyncrasies when it comes to what they will accept and how they will accept it. Again, experience is key, and we have tons of it. Make sure your inspector also has at least 5 years doing these inspections.

If they find issues with the property, do they have a contractor that will perform the repairs?

Be careful of firms that push and promote a certain contractor when it comes to light that there are repairs that need to be made before being able to provide a clean report. Why are they promoting that particular company? Are they getting a kickback from the contractor to push using them for repairs? Be careful if they are adamant about using a particular contractor as they may be in cahoots. You have to remember that this process is the beginning of what can be a very expensive proposition if your professional calls out a repair and tries to push his contractor to perform them.

Do they only point out issues that are specifically part of the inspection?

Another red flag to be wary of...an engineer that tries to add items onto the checklist that have NOTHING to do with the minimum requirements spelled out by law. If you have an engineering firm trying to convince you that your building's paint job is preventing you from passing, but not to worry, he knows a guy that can take care of it for you, run for the hills. You see, the report is, at its heart, a checklist. You can take a look at the forms and see that there are certain specific items that are pointed out with particular emphasis on the Structural (and Electrical) parts of the property. Items such as plumbing pipe leaks, broken floor tiles and finishes, faulty interior doors and cabinets, bad irrigation and landscaping (and the list goes on) are not items that are required to be repaired for the inspection. Roofs are a special item that unscrupulous inspectors like to call out, so be prepared to confront your inspector if they say you need a new roof if the old one does not have a substantial problem. At the end of the day, the best piece of advice that I can offer is to study the form and familiarize yourself with it so that when you are handed a long repair list, you can go down the list and if there is a repair that is not part of what is required, then you should ask your inspector questions and you should be satisfied with the answer.

References

Although many inspectors do not readily put their references on their proposals, they should be ready to share the information.

And of course, you should always ask for references from prospective professionals. If the structural engineering firm you are considering isn't willing to provide you with names and numbers of previous clients, that's definitely a red flag. Here at G. Batista we provide everyone not only with references, but with proof of insurance and proof of our licensing as well. Transparency, honesty, and the willingness to educate turns a client into a lifelong acquaintance.

WHAT IS THE COST OF A BUILDING RECERTIFICATION/ MILESTONE INSPECTION?

As in anything you go to purchase, it "buyer beware". It is your responsibility as the customer to be as vigilant as possible, particularly on something that is truly not cheap and can have a substantial and lasting financial impact on your pocketbook.

The fact is that, as in most professional services, there could be a large gap in price from one inspector to another. Established inspection firms have an office with its overhead and the prices tend to be higher than a one-man-band company where the inspector works out of their home. Inspectors price out the inspections by the type of structure or by the square foot, others by the number of units, and others by a combination of all of the above. It varies from professional to professional. When you talk to an inspector, they will ask you questions such as the address, number of units, square footage, and date that you received your notice. Have this information handy when you go to make your calls.

It is almost an obvious advice to give, but please obtain a written proposal. It is a good idea to to obtain 3 proposals that you can compare and given the advice in this guide, you should be able to make a more informed decision. If your proposals are far apart as with the price, do not worry since this is normal given what I have previously stated. It is now up to you to do your homework, study the proposals, and ask questions to minimize the chances that you will not be unnecessarily taken advantage of.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN YOUR PROPOSAL

Cheap prices

Beware of extremely cheap pricing. Some firms may try to undercut their pricing by piece mealing the process. There are several steps to the inspection process such as (a) performing the initial inspection, (b) letting the owner know of the repairs to be made by way of a "repair list", (c) performing a re-inspection to make sure that the repairs were done properly, and finally (d) providing you with the actual signed and sealed report. As you can see, there are several steps to be taken by the inspector. Some inspectors include all of the above steps in one lump-sum amount. Others provide a price that is broken out in several sub-totals. Study the proposals to determine where the gaps are, if any, and ask your inspector questions if there are any glaring discrepancies or if you have any questions on the terms and conditions of the agreement. It is not in the scope of this guide to go over the almost infinite items that can be on a contract, but in reality, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to review a contract of this type.

As in everyting, just because something is cheap, it does not necessarily mean that it is the best choice. Do your homework!

Be aware of per-visit charges

The item that most commonly becomes an issue is that of the number of visits. You should look at your proposal to see if the inspector is charging you a certain amount on a per-visit basis. And if your inspector charges you $300 per visit (which is the average price in the market) and goes to your property a total of 10 times when it should only take 5 visits, then you do the math. It can quickly add up. At a very minimum, it should take one visit to do the initial inspection (for a small-to-medium sized property), and then one more visit if the inspector needs to go back and make sure that the repairs were properly performed. Please note that there is not a one-size-fits-all answer to the question of "how many visits will it take to get me through the recertification"? The very best advice that I can give you is to be leary of proposals that charge on a "per-visit" basis as opposed to including it in their lump-sum price. And if you do find yourself signing an agreement that has a per-visit price, just be on the lookout that the inspector is not unnecessarily making trips to the prop-

erty. Here at G. Batista Engineering and Construction, we include all the site visits in our lump-sum price, and we also include one visit to make sure the repairs were done correctly.

Make sure the Inspectors are licensed

The proposal should state that they are a properly licensed company. If you are hiring an architectural or an engineering firm, they should have the following:

1. A valid Florida license to practice their profession. The license number should be in the proposal. If its not, then you should ask them for the license number of the person that will be signing and sealing the report. You can then do a search in www.myfloridalicense.com for the person to see if the license is valid and even if they have any history of complaints.
2. If the entity that you are hiring is a company (and not an individual), then they must also be registered with the Florida Board of Professional Engineers or with the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (The DBPR) in order to do business in Florida.

Hire an Attorney if you are not comfortable with the Agreement

Although most 40 year recertification agreements are not legally complicated documents, you should employ an attorney to interpret the agreement prior to getting it signed if you feel uncomfortable with the language.

After the report is completed, who takes it to the Building Department to file?

When your inspection passes and gets a "clean bill of health", your inspector should provide you with the final report. This report is to be handed in to your Building Department for review, processing, and approval. Most of the time, the inspectors role ends by providing you with the report. However, there are a few inspectors that, for an additional fee, will take the report to the Building Department for processing. Make sure that you are aware of these fees if you are to compare the other bids on a apples-to-apples basis.

I must state for the record that the vast majority of licensed engineers, inspectors, and architects are honest professionals that would not maliciously take advantage of their customers. We are all bound by a strict code of ethics when dealing with the public. But at the end of the day, this is a business and you must take the necessary steps to protect your own interests no matter the type of professional you are dealing with.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS AFTER YOU SIGN THE CONTRACT?

Every building is different. Some buildings are made of concrete, others of steel, and sometimes in rare cases in South Florida, some are made of wood. Also, different inspectors go about doing their inspections different than their other colleagues. Therefore it is safe to state that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to performing the inspection. You must rely heavily on your inspector as to the the work-flow process for getting the inspection performed.

The best advice I can give you is to hold a pre-inspection meeting to discuss the proposed process in order to set goals and expectations. Smaller buildings tend to not be a big deal; particularly those that only have one tenant. On the other hand, you will have a residential high-rise condominium with hundreds of units which can pose a challenge when the inspector asks to visit some of the interior of the units. Some of the more important items to discuss are the following:

1. Set a date for the start of the inspection.
2. Will the Owner will want a representative to a accompany the inspector on his visit? If you are confident about the professional you have hired, then you should feel at ease that your inspector can perform his inspection without your intervention. However, if there are access issues (such as getting to the roof, electrical rooms, or private unit spaces) then the inspector will need access to these areas and you are obligated to provide this access.
3. Set time frames for doing the inspection, obtaining the repair list (if applicable), and then obtaining the final signed and sealed report.
4. Establish who the main points of contact are both for the Owner and for the inspection firm. The flow of information should all go through these two individuals since this inspection could turn into a complicated endeavor and communication avenues should be clear.
5. Make sure that you have the access keys to areas that are to be inspected and the prior permission of tenants and/or residents for access in a timely manner.
6. Make sure that the inspector will have the proper tools and equipment to perform the inspection. For example, many times engineers do not carry around ladders in order to do a roof inspection where there is no other way to access the roof. Also, as an example, if you already know that there are moisture issues in your building, it might be a good idea to ask your inspector to bring his moisture meter or thermal camera to better assess the issue while he is there performing the inspection. Take advantage of this professional while they are there. It likely won't cost you any more money.
7. If you do not want your inspector to inspect items that are not strictly a part of the 40 Year Recertification, then you can kindly remind your inspector of your wish.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE ARE A LOT OF REPAIRS THAT NEED TO BE DONE?

This is a question that we must include in this guide, but the answer is so complicated, that it will require an entirely different set of volumes of books to discuss. However, for the purposes of this guide, I will state the more fundamental aspects of performing repairs.

Start with the low-hanging fruits

As with any repair list, it is easiest to start with those items that are simplest to accomplish. For example, if there is not enough illumination in the hallway and all you need to do is change the faulty light-bulb, then you have scratched one item from the list. Have your inspector assist you in identifying those items that can be easily completed without having to hire an engineer to do plans or to pull a construction permit.

Discuss with your inspector what your options are with other larger repairs

At times there will be items that you will need to repair that will require a design professional to provide you with plans and for a licensed contractor to perform the work. This is where things get very complicated. If you are required to perform repairs that require plans and a permit, then you can follow the very basic steps outlined below:

1. **Hire your design professional.** Luckily, I have already written a guide entitled "G. Batista's One-Hour Guide to Hiring an Engineer". You can access our website at askgbatista.com and download a copy of it. It is a very handy, real-world guide that is especially tailored to South Florida. Note that the same person that does your Inspection could also be the person that can provide you with the plans if the person is qualified to perform that task. Here at G. Batista Engineering and Construction, we have a full staff of design professionals that can provide plans and specifications for your project.
2. **Provide the plans to your Contractors for bidding.** Once your engineer or design professional has completed the plans, then it is time to give the plans to your bidding contractors so that they can provide you with bids for the work.

DID YOU KNOW?

For larger repair projects, we here at G. Batista Engineering and Construction provide "Owners Representative" services. Access our website at www.askgbatista.com under the "Owners Representative" link in the "Services" area.

3. **Hire your contractor and have them pull the permits and perform the work.** This part is by far the most complicated because construction is by nature complicated and fraught with risk to all parties. The best advice I can give you is to hire a contractor with a verified track record. When I say "verified", I mean that you talk to their references and check out their work. As of the writing of this guide, I do not have a book to assist the public in setting yourself up for success by hiring the right contractor. In the mean time, there is a lot of good information on the internet that can provide valuable advice. If your project is large (say in the $1 Million Dollar range), then you will be best suited to hire an "Owners Representative" which is basically an experienced individual that will represent you and hold your hand through the entire design and construction process. We at G. Batista Engineering and Construction provide "Owners Representative" services. Access our website at www.askgbatista.com under the "Owners Representative" link in the "Services" area.
4. **Completing the project.** Once the project is completed and the contractor closes his permit, then you can rest because the hard part is over.

THE FINAL STEP – GETTING YOUR REPORT

Here we are. Finally. You've done the inspection, performed the repairs and now it is time to ask your inspector for the final signed and sealed report. This report is basically the same form that you initially received in the mail that is now filled out by your inspector and signed and sealed (a raised seal that is crimped on the actual form). You need to make sure that the report has the following:

- That it is signed and sealed with the inspectors signature on top of the seal (unless its electronic seal).
- The inspector must include the date on each seal.
- Each page of the report should have the original signature and seal.
- If the repairs were properly completed, there should not be anything on the report that will indicate that there are other repairs that are still left to perform.
- Ask the inspector to provide you with 2 sets of reports in original so that you can keep one for your file. Also, there are times when the city could ask you for a second copy. Many cities now accept emailed reports after the engineer has properly signed the reports electronically.

With your reports in hand, you (or your inspector) will need to go to the Building Department for the City where the property is located. As a professional that has been doing inspections for a long time, I can tell you that each city is different on how they process the inspections. Some cities don't charge a fee, most Cities do. Most Cities will ask you to fill out an application form which is different from all the other cities. The process times are also different. In conclusion, be prepared to spend some time at the Building Department when handing in the report. The employees at the Building Departments are usually very helpful in answering any questions you may have relating to this task.

Once they have reviewed and approved the report, then they will provide you with a notice (either by mail or email) letting you know that you have been successful at attaining your Recertification/Milestone on your building. And if there is any problem, they will also provide you with a notice with the reason that the inspection was denied.

CONCLUSION

I hope that this guide has been helpful. We at G. Batista Engineering and Construction pride ourselves in guiding our customers through complex engineering and construction issues because we know that these types of tasks can get very complicated and cumbersome for those that are not in the industry. Even for us that do this every day, it can get quite burdensome and problematic. We are here to help you. And if you need any questions answered on this, or any other engineering and construction related item, feel free to contact us and "just ask G. Batista". Thank you for your time.

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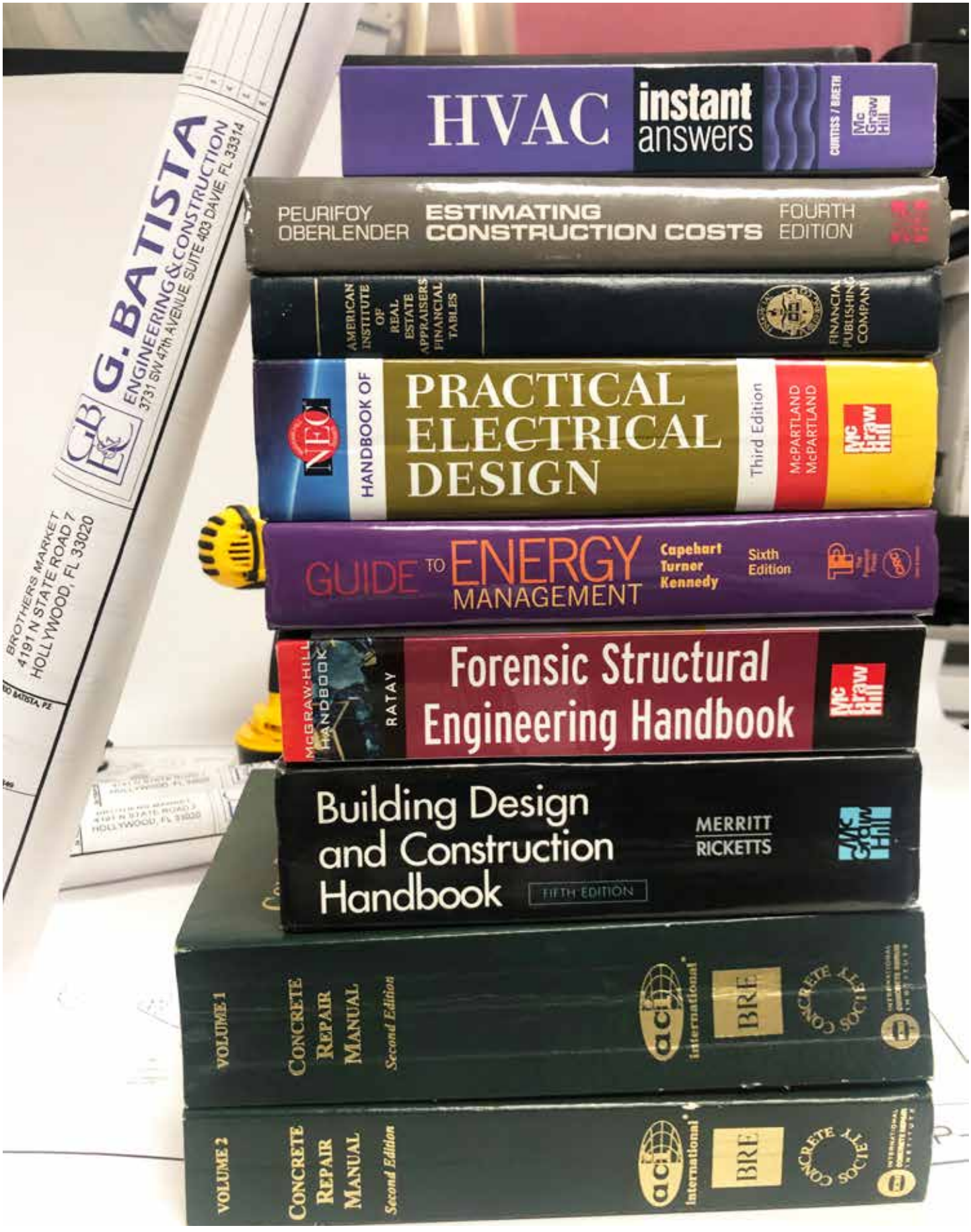
For more information about our services, go to www.askgbatista.com

Just ask G. BATISTA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DID YOU KNOW?

I pride myself in guiding my customers. It is my passion and the foundation of my success. If you need guidance on any topics dealing with engineering or construction relating to your building, just "Ask G. Batista".

If you have any engineering or construction questions, just ask G. Batista.

Log on to www.askgbatista.com for more information

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