

Has safety improved after last year's Philadelphia building collapse?

A year ago this month, a building under demolition in Center City collapsed and crashed onto the Salvation Army Thrift Store next door. Six people died and 14 were injured in the collapse. Afterward, the mayor announced a series of measures designed to prevent a similar building collapse from happening again. But some say the city needs to do a better job of following the rules it set up.

The issue is important both for people who live and work near buildings under demolition as well as construction workers who are on site. Depending on the building, heavy equipment such as cranes, bulldozers and wrecking balls may be used. Explosives may also be used. Falling debris is a real threat for demolition workers.

In late April, for example, [NBC Philadelphia reported](#) that two workers were injured when debris from an adjacent building fell on them during the demolition of an imminently dangerous building in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. They were in the clean-up phase of demolition when a piece of brownstone fell on them. Both that story and a recent story by newsworks pointed out that the city does not require contractors in some cases to follow the city's new safety regulations.

In February, the City Council beefed up the city's demolition regulations and requirements for contractors. An attorney for people who were injured or lost loved ones in last year's building collapse said the most important change is a new requirement for demolition contractors to submit a safety plan. But he says that the city doesn't always enforce it.

The city now hires pre-approved contractors to demolish

dangerous properties. But those contractors are not required to submit a safety plan. The city controller also found that the city did not always require safety plan for demolitions. Licensing and Inspections officials say the city enforces its rules as they are supposed to and that the department's data system is outdated. He says that contractors who are pre-approved must follow a standard safety plan.

The attorney for victims of last year's collapse maintains that the city is not enforcing its own rule. He told newsworks that another collapse is possible, "and the blood's going to be on their hands."□

Source:

- Our law firm handles workers' compensation claims for injured construction workers in Pennsylvania. For more information, read our page on construction site accidents.