

Condo Smarts

Headline: The joys and dangers of the holiday season

Topic: Holiday Tips

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Dear Tony: Our strata corporation has been having the “ban live cut Christmas trees” debate for several years without much success, and every year there is at least one owner or tenant who abandons their dead tree in the parking garage, or rams it down the garbage chute, or tosses it off their balcony into our landscaping, or drags it through a hallway leaving a trail of needles in the carpets. Our cameras only capture the front entry of our building and the suspected culprits always mysteriously remain unidentified. How could we best encourage our owners to support our bylaws that would prohibit live trees for holidays and festivals?

Kyra Browning, Surrey

Dear Kyra: Holiday decorations are a wonderful way to brighten up the dark winter months and to celebrate festivals year round, but they do come with liabilities. Live trees still capture our nostalgic celebration of Christmas, and yet they also come with the dangers of increased fire risk, damaging building common areas, pest infestations (always a treat when the bugs hatch), and increased maintenance. Even if your owners adopt a bylaw that prohibits live trees, don't be surprised to find a few owners who still smuggle in live trees during the late night hours.

In many situations, a good dose of resident awareness may solve your problems. A seasonal flyer will encourage owners to properly care for their trees, how to reduce fire hazards, provides locations of when and how to recycle their trees, and a complimentary tree bag encourages everyone to seal their trees before they drag them through the common areas. In addition to trees, attention should also be paid to exterior decorations if they are permitted, such as lights or displays. Strings of lights stapled to a building exterior

may result in far more damage than a dried old tree dragging down your hallways.

While the displays and lights seem like a good idea, not everyone in your complex may share the same beliefs. Be open minded about supporting other festivals through the year and avoid restricting your bylaws to the Christmas season alone. If you decorate your common areas or lobby for the Christmas season, consider the traditions of all residents and how they wish to celebrate their holidays.

There are also activities associated with New Year celebrations and festivals to be considered. Fireworks and firecrackers also increase the risk of fire, and may result in noise that is a nuisance to residents and a harm to pets. Lighting fireworks off a roof top deck or a balcony is just a bad idea. After the recent Halloween season of fireworks disasters, several town house complexes have now adopted a complete ban on any types of fireworks, firecrackers or sparklers within a strata lot or on the common property.

Living in a strata corporation comes with the routine noises and disruptions of everyone sharing the same common facilities and walls. The traditional countdown party to New Year's Eve is anticipated, the New Year's party that is raucous until 4am is a nuisance. In a strata corporation, your home is not your castle, but it is a great living experience for many of us who understand that our activities and behaviours need to be tempered with consideration and respect for our neighbours. A safe holiday season to all.