

Condominium Home Owners Association

A non-profit association serving strata owners since 1976

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Condo Smarts

Headline: Heating and piping often strata owner's responsibility

Topic: Frozen pipes

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For some reason, B.C. home owners forget what the rest of Canada lives with for months on end: sub-zero temperatures. Every year, our office fields hundreds of calls from people wanting to know who is responsible for the damage caused when pipes freeze.

As well, the recent mild winters have lulled Snowbirds – who leave town for tropical climes in the winter month – into a false sense of security.

More than ever, the complaint is: What do we do when someone has turned off the heat and is away for the winter?

One townhouse owner went so far to have the gas and heat turned off for the winter to avoid costs, but forgot to turn off the water. This combination resulted in the pipes freezing, and not only the owner's home but also the neighbouring homes on both sides suffered serious water damage. After six hours of running water, emergency access was required to the vacant townhouse and the damage is estimated at \$70,000 to the three homes.

Strata Law: The strata corporation is responsible for maintaining the common property. That includes such items defined as common heating systems and common piping.

But most townhouses do not share a common heating system or common water systems, so it is the owners' responsibility to maintain and repair the heating and piping in their home. A reasonable level of heat in the strata lot to protect the building and prevent losses is an important part of maintaining a strata lot. The owners of this strata may discover that they have to pay the insurance deductible and other related costs.

Tips: A winter checklist notice can provide helpful reminders to strata lot owners. Whether you are in a townhouse or apartment condo frozen pipes can cause serious damage. It is critical to maintain constant heat during sub-zero temperatures.

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