

Condo Smarts

Headline: Act Now, Before a Theft Occurs

Topic: Mailboxes

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Written by: Tony Gioventu

Dear Tony: The Richmond RCMP has identified a growing number of issues with mail theft in strata corporations and other multi-family properties. As you know, older buildings often have less sophisticated security in their entries, antiquated lighting, often no surveillance cameras, and older mailbox assemblies that are an easy targets of forced entry. Mail theft often results in a variety of secondary criminal activities including credit card fraud, identity theft, and financial losses affecting owners and tenants and strata communities, and forced entry to the buildings resulting in additional costs to repair damages. It would be helpful if you could explain to those who reside in these multi-family properties who is responsible for the mail boxes, locks and keys for each of the mailboxes. Policing after a break-in is costly and time consuming. Support from those who reside in these properties to encourage strata mailbox upgrades would not only deter would be mail thieves and protect residents, but it would ultimately be a less costly solution for everyone who is affected.

Corporal Kevin Krygier, Crime Prevention Unit

Dear Kevin: Thank you for your timely email. With a combination of the holiday season and aging buildings, owner complaints about mail fraud is at an all-time high in strata buildings across the province. In almost every strata, the collective mail box system is common property, and as a result the responsibility of the strata corporation. Many strata corporations have adopted bylaws or rules that require an owner to pay for and maintain their own access keys and to replace locks at their cost in the event they have lost their keys, but if the mail boxes have been collectively vandalized, the strata generally covers the cost of the replacement systems, new locks and keys. Sadly most strata corporations wait until they have been hit before they address the problem. By then the emergency costs,

damages and losses to the owners are far more costly than taking a proactive approach. Allen Regan, Manager Broker of Bayside Property Services in Burnaby points out that there are several companies in the security and locksmith industry who can provide superior upgrades to mail box systems. The value of the mail box upgrade often goes beyond just preventing access. According to Alan, "if the mail box system is secure, the building has sufficient lighting for security and personal safety, and the access points of a building are well controlled, the overall security of the residents is increased, resulting in a decrease to mail box thefts, storage locker and strata lot break ins and thefts to cars in the parking garage."

The mail box upgrade is one of those decisions that a strata corporation can consider that the owners and tenants will directly benefit from and generally support. The industry service providers are happy to provide quotes and assessments at no cost, and the strata can schedule the upgrade as part of their routine security expenses they approve as part of their annual budgets. Of course, this only works well only if your owners and residents participate. The no key – no entry policy is still one of the best policies in a strata to create a safe community. I encourage everyone to contact their community Block Watch (in Richmond, blockwatch@richmond.ca) for more information and to register for the program. A No Key-No Entry sticker on your front door is a great reminder to residents and visitors that your community is secure, and not an open invitation to criminals. Both programs are free and can also provide other valuable security resources.