

Condo Smarts

Headline: Emergency preparedness week BC

Topic: Disaster Planning

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Dear Tony: Our strata had a minor fire a couple of months ago. Most of the construction is complete, and owners and tenants have moved back into the suites that were damaged. There were no injuries and most of the damages were water related. The event did raise a number of serious questions for our strata. No one had an owner/resident list, a pet list, or any idea of what to do in the event of an emergency. If we had an owner with serious mobility issues no one knew, and no one was in charge. The fire department were amazing at evacuating the building, but it would have been much easier for them if we had an updated resident list. We are trying to organize our strata into an emergency plan, but the owners are not willing. Is there any regulation that forces us to plan? Not a bad idea, but I suspect it's unlikely.

Karen R.

Dear Karen: Strata corporations/multifamily residences, commercial industrial buildings, and institutional buildings are all required to have a fire safety plan. The plan is essential for residents to understand their emergency exits or safe refuges in the building. However, the plan only has value if your residents know about. Keeping the fire safety plan on a dusty shelf in the electrical room or buried in strata files is of no value. May 1-7 is emergency preparedness week across Canada, and in BC, we are likely to face building fires, forest fires, landslides, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, wind storms, ice storms and extreme snow events. Luckily we avoided tornados and plagues of locusts! The development and enactment of an emergency plan is for the protection and safety of your residents, their pets and your property owners. Start by going to gov.bc.ca/PreparedBC and download the resource planning handbook. Identify someone in your strata who is willing to be the team leader for planning and education of your owners. This does not have to be a

council member, but this person will need access to information and records to develop a working plan for everyone.

The planning should educate your strata community on how to prepare and how to respond to emergencies, and provide educational information for residents and their families. Start by developing an inventory of pets and residents. Anyone who has mobility issues should be identified, to enable emergency services to assist them as a priority. A building plan to assist rescue workers is critical. The plan may also locate shut offs for services such as water, gas and electricity. Once you have your basic information gathered, host a resident's information meeting. Resident meetings to develop emergency plans are also a great way to build community. Canvass for other strata residents who are willing to provide leadership and education.

Instruct residents on personal emergency preparedness, the need for personal insurance, emergency supplies and evacuation of the building. A set assembly area is ideal for resident safety and to be able to identify residents still in the building. The basics that everyone should prepare are water, non-perishable food, flashlights, portable radios, medication, personal papers and ready cash, a whistle, first aid kit, and safe clothing and footwear. It may not be possible to return to your units in the event of an emergency. The two recent earthquakes in Ecuador and Japan were a wakeup call for our region that sits on the same fault lines around the Pacific Rim. In a major event it could be days before help arrives. Planning today will save lives and prevent injuries.