



To Catch a Thief

A wave of bike thefts is sweeping across Ontario. The Ottawa Police Services reported seeing an almost 70 per cent spike as of April 2021. In Toronto, nearly 4,000 bikes were reported stolen last year, the majority from residential buildings. Many condominiums have been targeted repeatedly, and one of the reasons is that, historically, they are very soft on security.

BY SCOTT HILL

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When a security problem or vulnerability arises, the traditional method of dealing with it is to look for the most cost-effective, or no-cost, method to address it, rather than the most security-effective solution. From a criminology perspective, this has some similarities, although not exact, with the broken window concept. Briefly, the broken window theory states that a security vulnerability unaddressed will attract further security incidents that will escalate both in severity and frequency.

Inevitably, condominiums are starting to change their position on security, and there are those that have taken a proactive strategy. A few Toronto-based condos authorized a “safety and security” committee, made up of owners, to research security concerns and solutions and advise the board of directors.

Part of the contributing factors to this systematic problem may be the incomplete advice that is being given to condominiums. Traditionally, when condominiums seek security advice, they tend either to seek out those municipal organizations that offer a “free security audit”, or they go to one of their security suppliers who offers to evaluate the security of the facility for free.

The issues that arise from these types of reviews is that they are quite often incomplete; municipal organizations do not provide security consulting as their core business.

Another concern is that the audits may not be impartial. If you are asking a security equipment provider to evaluate a need for extra security cameras, then there is certainly a very good chance that the report will have the condominium purchasing additional cameras.

This is not to suggest that there is anything unethical on the part of the supplier—they provide cameras and will usually be very confident of the level of security their product provides. The question is, will the proposed solutions be sufficient to reduce crime activities within the condominium?

Let’s take a quick look at what some experts say is necessary to reduce crime:

1 Address the underlying cause of crime
This is a social-political conversation that would

go beyond the ability of a condominium to address, even in their neighborhood. One action that we are noting is that, in some neighborhoods, several condominiums are bonding or forming associations in order to have more voices represented when they petition their city officials to take more active measures in protecting their areas.

That aside, in most cases, the condominium will have a limited ability to address the underlying cause of the crime. For instance, the underlying cause of bike theft is the shortage of bikes, potentially caused by the pandemic as more people decided to take up cycling as a means of travel and exercise.

A condominium does not have the ability to address the current shortage of bikes but is in a position to see what is taking place due to this shortage.

There have even been reports of bikes that were stolen at knifepoint. In the case of condominium management, forewarned is forearmed. By monitoring local crime trends—usually easily accessible from local police websites—board and committee members can keep abreast of what is taking place in their backyard.

In this case, condominiums may not be able to do anything to address a province-wide problem but being aware of the situation allows them to take steps to protect their facilities. This may be as simple as placing an extra layer of security around the magnets which are attracting the bad actors. By doing this, the condominium is ensuring that the cost, or risk, of obtaining the goods outweighs the benefits of getting them.

2 Deter offending activity
The condominium should make the risk of getting caught outweigh the joy the adversary will get from obtaining the goods.

For this to take place, look at the probability of detection and the potential response time of the condominium. Most condominiums are protected by surveillance cameras, as well as a key or fobbed entrance. If a bad actor is able to breach the perimeter or envelope of the building, the condominium should

look at the likelihood that that breach will be caught in real time so that a security response can be organized.

To be effective, a security response must be organized and completed before the adversary has time to complete his/her objective. To deter the offenders, there has to be a very real risk that they may be caught and prosecuted for their bad behaviour. Some factors that may affect the adversary's decision to attempt their objective (steal the bike) may include the visual security readiness of the building, the reputation of the condo in dealing with past attempts, and the difficulty or ease of gaining entry.

If an adversary is confident that he/she will not be interrupted in their commissioning of a crime, and that they have a high likelihood of success in accomplishing their objective, then they are more likely to attempt the theft. Condos that have a reputation of preventing crimes and making arrests will be less likely to be targeted because the cost is too high to the adversary.

3 Reduce the opportunities
 In addition to discouraging the motivation of would-be thieves, condominiums should look for ways to reduce the opportunities for crime to take place.

Condominiums are forming associations within their buildings and their neighbourhoods in order to share information and look for methods of eliminating the vulnerabilities.

At a basic level, condos are commissioning security audits in order to assess their risk and to develop strategies to mitigate them. These strategies may include increased lighting, better locking mechanisms, mobile patrols, CCTV monitoring and response, static security guards, intrusion detection systems, and many more. Some condos are taking the extra step and implementing robust security master plans in their buildings.

By having a complete security plan in place, a property is able to determine what is working and adjust what is not. A security plan is a living document

that may change when the property understands the underlying cause of crime.

Condos looking to reduce the crime in their buildings need to keep their thumbs on the pulse of the neighbourhoods. Look for ways to discourage criminal motivation, and reduce the opportunities to gain access to the building and its assets. □

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The preceding article is an expanded and updated version of a previous blog post, 3 Steps for Reducing Crime in Condominiums," as published on 3D Security Services.



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