



Security highlights for the high-rise

Assessing and upgrading security procedures and equipment for condominium buildings comes with its own specific set of requirements

By Scott Hill

William H. Webster, a former director of the FBI and chair of Homeland Security Advisory Council, once said, “Security is always seen as too much until the day it is not enough.”

Although the quote was said during a debate titled National Security vs. Personnel Liberty, it is equally applicable to condominium corporations and their operational procedures. Condominiums face several challenges when it comes to implementing and upgrading security.

The first could be the governing body; boards of directors are elected from the owners (mostly) of the condominium and they are charged with managing the well-being of the condominium. These owners usually come from diverse backgrounds and bring their own expertise to the board. However, if there is no one familiar with security or risk management on the board, quite frequently (in the absence of serious or frequent security events) security is pushed to the back burner.

The reason it gets pushed to the

back is the second challenge that condominiums face when looking for ways to better protect the residents and their property: money. While most security professionals will agree that the allocation of funds to the security budget is almost always a challenge, in condominiums it is compounded by the source of the funding. Condominiums are solely funded through the common element (or condominium) fees that are collected from the owners. When costs increase, that means that the board of directors must meet this increase in costs by raising the condominium fees for all owners (which is never a popular decision). When board members (and the condominium managers who advise them) look at cost-cutting during the annual budget process, quite frequently security in the building is carefully reviewed and debated, with sometimes less than optimal results.

The third challenge in funding security solutions in condominium buildings is the transparency of the system. When it is working properly, no one notices it. This can sometimes cause owners and board members to question the need to even have it in place.

Despite the challenges, many condominiums and their stakeholders are taking a proactive approach to evaluating and upgrading their security within the facility. This enlightened approach has resulted from many different sources, but a primary one has been the widespread reporting of security vulnerabilities of condominiums.

A second reason that condominiums are undertaking a preemptive look at security is due to owner/resident demand. Earlier this year, TD Canada Trust conducted a survey of what potential buyers are looking for when they consider the purchase of a condominium. In that survey, 94 per cent of those polled listed security as the most important consideration, ahead of energy efficiency (92 per cent), having a balcony (90 per cent), parking spots (87 per cent), or being close to public transport (84 per cent). This has caused management at condominiums to review their security systems, not only to protect persons and property, but to protect owner investment and market competitiveness within the industry.

One of the struggles of management is where to start when they decide to evaluate their security.

A popular option is the commissioning of a security audit. The goal of the security audit is to review the effectiveness of the existing security measures, identify vulnerabilities within the complex, and to provide multiple

options to address them. In order to be a proper review of the security systems in place, condominiums are recommended to ensure that the person conducting the audit is impartial (is not a supplier or installer of security systems within the complex), is familiar with condominium operations (and their challenges), and is a security professional experienced in providing such reports.

It has been our experience that a condominium chooses to undertake a security audit during one of three times. Two are proactive and the third is reactive.

The reactive time is after security incidents have taken place. A condominium that suffers serious break-ins, vandalism, theft or assault will look to better protect their residents by identifying and rectifying the vulnerabilities within the condominium. In this manner, the board of directors and managers can report back to the owners — who are usually legitimately concerned about such matters — that action has been taken, and that the corporation is addressing the issue in a professional manner by hiring qualified advisors.


A second time that condominiums undertake (proactively) a security audit is before they update their Reserve Fund Study (RFS) report. Condominiums in Ontario are required to complete a report every seven years (with an update in between) which ensures that they have adequate funding to meet all capital projects that may be required in the future (30 years). This is called a reserve fund report and is instrumental

in condominium operations and budgeting. Previously, very few of the RFS reports incorporated detailed physical security components and/or upgrades.

Condominium management is addressing this issue by completing an assessment in advance of the scheduling of the RFS. Once the audit is reviewed and recommendations approved, a copy of the security audit can be provided to the engineer completing the study and incorporated into the funding schedule. In this manner, security upgrades and enhancements can be scheduled over a period of several years, reducing the financial impact to the condominium and the owners. Additionally, the life-cycle of the security equipment within the condominium can be determined so that replacements and/or upgrades can be inserted into the funding schedule. This is the beginning of having a master security plan and it ensures that the equipment will be cycled out when they reach the end of their useful life.

Recently, we have seen a trend where condominiums are proactively commissioning a security audit within their first year of operations. Given the rate that condominiums are being built (specifically in Ontario), it is becoming increasingly important to ensure that inherent security vulnerabilities do not go unnoticed. Condominiums, in their first year of operations (in Ontario, but we believe this is becoming more widespread across Canada) are charged with conducting a report with an engineer that identifies, within the scope listed by Tarion Home Warranty, the construction deficiencies within the condominium. This report is called a performance audit and is provided to the developer (builder) who is responsible for addressing the deficiencies listed. Much in the same manner as the reserve fund study, a copy of the audit can be provided to the engineer conducting the performance audit.

In many cases, some of the vulnerabilities in the condominium have been judged to be construction deficiencies and were included on the report as a warrantable item on the Tarion Report. As such, these issues would then be the responsibility of the building, and should be fixed by the developer at no cost to the condominium corporation.

As noted above, condominium corporations have many different options to consider when deciding on how to protect the property and the people that live inside. The first step in considering these options is to audit the current security solutions and identify their effectiveness. As part of the review, unaddressed vulnerabilities will come to light and they must be evaluated based on the level of risk that they pose to the owners and their property. It is of limited value to start implementing new procedures/equipment before the effectiveness (or lack of) of the current systems has been determined. Once these two steps have been completed, only then can the corporation allocate the resources/funds required to properly and professionally protect the facility. 

Scott Hill of 3D Security Services, is a Registered Condominium Manager (RCM) with the Accredited Condominium Managers of Ontario, a Physical Security Professional (PSP) with ASIS, and a Certified Security Project Manager (CSPM) with the Security Industry Association.

Lawyer, Mediator & Author of *Visual Evidence*



Elliott Goldstein, B.A., J.D.

Cell: 416.315.0066 elgold@rogers.com

Mediation of Disputes - Commercial, Shareholder, Employment.
Litigation to Collect Debts or Defend Customer Lawsuits.
Alarm Installation & Monitoring Contracts, Employment Agreements.
Minute Book Reviews and Updates, Incorporations.
Wills, Powers of Attorney for Property and Personal Care.
Video Surveillance Law Seminars, Forensic Video Analysis Law.

www.videoevidence.ca

45 Redondo Drive, Thornhill (Vaughan), ON, Canada L4J 7S7

Fax: 905.597.6226