



Spending your security budget wisely

Condominiums have several choices when it comes to addressing security concerns within the building. As is often the case, these choices come with concerns about making the wrong choice. On occasion, this "paralysis by analysis" can turn into a lack of progression as decisions get delayed in order to research each option thoroughly, thereby stalling the issue.

BY SCOTT

A united front

One of the most important points that a condominium should keep in mind is that their security systems must be integrated. This means that all the different components of the security system (e.g., lighting, security cameras, access control, key procedures, etc.) must be harmonized so they are in sync with one another.

A basic (and common) example of security systems not integrated with each other is when a security camera is situated in a location with insufficient lighting. Although the camera may be of proper resolution and position, the lighting prevents the camera from operating at its optimum efficiency level.

Knowing where you stand

The first step in ensuring that the condominium has an integrated security system is to fully evaluate the security measures that are in place. This is usually done through a security audit. A security audit is defined as "an independent review of the effectiveness of the existing security measures by a qualified, impartial party." During this review, the security system will be evaluated and ranked according to risk, and you will receive recommendations to both reduce the risk and ensure that the security solutions are integrated.

It is important to note that each facility should have an independent review. The leading reference guides on security is ASIS's Protection



of Assets series. In the Physical Security section, it speaks to this topic and unequivocally states that each facility should have its own security plan. It is not recommended that facilities blindly copy what other buildings are doing, as it may be wrong or, at the very least, not effective for that particular property. Security solutions should be tailored to the individual condominium to ensure maximum protection.

Top security considerations

When condominiums are looking at different security solutions that they may wish to integrate, there are three basic categories that they may choose from: Human Resources, technology, and policies/procedures. As one may expect, the effectiveness of the security solutions is directly related to the cost of that security measure.

Human resources. This is most effective, and expansive, security solution and is usually in the form of a security guard or concierge posted on-site. Having a guard will allow the condominium to react in real-time to security events and will act as a security deterrent. A popular question that is often posed during the security audit is the effectiveness of the individual guards on site. The answer to this question is often a review of the training that the security company provides to their employees. For a condominium that is investing a significant budget in having a guard on site, it is critical to ensure that the security company understands condominiums. As well, it is equally important for the board of directors/property manager to



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review the post orders, which are a set of written instructions that detail the duties and expectations of the guards/concierge when on-site. No property should ever be without updated Post Orders.

Another option for condominiums which may not have the budget for a full-time security presence, is to have security on site during high-risk hours (approximately 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM) or even to contract with a company that provides mobile patrols. Once again, in order to achieve maximum return on the security investment, the expectations of the guards should be clearly defined, and a written report should be submitted after each patrol shift. In this manner, management can track the expenses, as well as identify reoccurring problems/security concerns.

Technology. The second most effective security measure, with a corresponding price tag, is the utilization of technology. Like all technology, as new equipment/devices are introduced, the costs of the older models are reduced. As a result, technologies like intrusion detection systems that were currently beyond the budget of most condominiums are now readily available and are being implemented in condominiums with great success.

When Ontario increased the minimum wage, there were suppliers promoting technology as the primary alternative solution to the rising cost of having a guard/concierge on site. While technology has a definitive place in the overall security plan, it is only a critical piece of the puzzle and should be supported by other security measures. There are concerns about reaction time to cameras that are monitored. For example, it is not uncommon for perpetrators to ignore security cameras and wear hoodies to prevent themselves from being easily identified.

When it comes to technology, a condominium can ensure a proper return on their security dollars by confirming that the technology in place is operating at effective performance levels, as well as being integrated with other security solutions within the property.

As with all equipment in the condominium, security technology has a useful life and will eventually need to be replaced. For this reason, many condominiums commission a security audit in advance of the updating of their Reserve Fund Study (RFS). By having this report in advance, the condominium is able to direct the organization completing the RFS to incorporate any required replacements of the security equipment into the future funding schedule. This is a much more preferable solution as it is a proactive approach rather than a reactive one, such as in cases where a condominium waits for the equipment to fail and then scrambles to replace it before a security event takes place.

Policies/procedures: This category usually has the lowest (or no) cost, but it is generally judged as the least effective/reliable. The reason for this is that the effectiveness relies on the proper implementation by personnel. Once the human factor enters into the equation, there is the possibility of human error which, in turn, reduces the perception of effective security.

Despite this limitation, proper security policies/procedures are critical to a condominium's overall security rating. They may be as simple as educating owners/residents on the dangers of letting a stranger “tailgate” (follow through an already open door) into the property. This can be done through condominium newsletters, signage on the doors, reminders at the Annual General Meeting, etc.

The more buy-in from the owners on these procedures, the safer the condominium becomes as there are more eyes watching. A note of caution is that residents should be instructed not to confront anyone attempting to enter the building, but instead retreat to a safe place and call the proper authorities (security guard on site, police, etc.).

Another policy that a condominium may wish to implement is regular audits of their access control system (Fob Audit). During many security audits, it is reported that management often does not know how many old fobs/keys are still in circulation (e.g., from residents who have moved or sold their units). A regularly scheduled Fob Audit is a process that can be implemented to ensure that only registered users are accessing the building.

Investing in peace of mind

Within a condominium budget, security solutions compete with many other expenses – particularly when they are called from the operating budget. For this reason alone, condominium management should always ensure that the allocated security budget is being spent wisely and in the right areas. An audit of the existing security systems will prioritize the current risks that the condominium may be exposed to and identify the areas that need to be addressed. Once this has been established, the condominium may implement one of the three categories (or most likely a combination) to address this issue.

Ultimately, one thing that will never change is that the condominium will want to ensure that they are getting full value for their security investment. □

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