

COVID-19 Updates Features

Condo safety and security programs adapt to COVID-19 conditions

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By Rebecca Gicante



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Leaders throughout the security management industry continue to rapidly adapt to the challenges presented by COVID-19. The industry is making significant advancements in services to their buildings which benefit the clients they serve and the public, creating safer buildings.

Workplace Safety Advancements

Your condominium is a “workplace” and while the COVID-19 parameters are rapidly changing, the legislation used to govern Ontario’s workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and workplaces safe and free from hazards. Workers still have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the Ministry of Labour.

In March, Ontario witnessed 1,440 complaints about workplace safety related to COVID-19. That number was up from only 14 in February according to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

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COVID-19 is changing how we manage and prepare our building staff with policies and procedures. At every building, there’s a stack of binders sitting at the security desk. The information is difficult to navigate and maintain, but required reading by all staff before being assigned any role within the building. In fact, I would suggest that these binders be used on a daily basis to review internal operating and safety procedures.

There is a requirement for these documents to be reviewed and updated within the workplace due to the COVID 19 hazard in the workplace. One security provider in Toronto has not only updated their safety plans to reflect the new hazard, but they have also updated emergency response procedures and reduced the need for staff to share resources and equipment.

Pennine Security Solutions, a physical security company protecting several dozen high-rise condominiums in the Greater Toronto Area, recently launched a mobile application that allows their guards to digitally access the site’s Standard Operating Procedures and Health & Safety Procedures from their smart device.

“We needed a solution that from a leadership perspective made it easy to immediately roll-out updates as the COVID-19 hazards change. Now, we can do this instantly and without additional costs. Physical distancing, revisions and Personal

Protective Equipment requirements needed to be “worked” into almost every policy and procedure within our organization and we take our efforts to reducing our staff’s cross contamination risks very seriously,” explained Matthew Williams, president of Pennine Security Solutions.

Security, similar to all employers in Ontario, are required “to take every reasonable precaution for the safety of workers (OHSA)” during the pandemic. The employer is responsible to “prove” this due diligence under the Act, and to be compliant with the OHSA general duty clause; a workplace specific hazard assessment must be performed. It is that documented hazard assessment that a workplace and/or supervisor can implement appropriate risk elimination and/or mitigation actions.

In 2018, there were 907 convictions under the Occupational Health & Safety Act in Ontario resulting in over \$12.6 million in fines.

Health and safety also needs to be a priority for condo boards and property managers who can be identified as workplace supervisors under the Act. A supervisor is a person appointed by an employer who is in charge of a workplace or has authority over a worker. A supervisor can be called a manager, team leader, coordinator and other titles.

A picture says more than a thousand words

Security providers in Canada have been innovative in their relentless pursuit to deliver services that resonate beyond security risks – and protect the corporation. A physical security program has far reaching benefits to building owners in the daily documentation of risks and hazards.

Increased “virtual patrols” are only half of the answer as COVID-19 has forced condominium residents to stay home and therefore created reduced surveillance.

Additionally, pedestrian and vehicular traffic in and around the building has been significantly decreased. This generates a new security concern for buildings due to the reduction of the amount of natural surveillance that residents and visitors create.

Proactive security service providers and property managers of residential buildings have increased security patrols through the effective use of existing security cameras.

Increasing patrols conducted by security and concierge helps to ensure a safe and secure building. These patrols, at a minimum, should entail a review of each camera, extending to the entire camera view, and be documented in detail.

Physical patrols should continue but viewed through a prioritized lens.

“By adding additional patrols, it allows for the full and active use of equipment at your building without adding additional costs,” stated Jason Reid, Senior Advisor for National Life Safety Group.

“In addition, it allows for detailed ‘digital’ documentation of these patrols – something each organization may need in the coming months.”

According to recent WSIB statistics, over 17,000 people miss time from work every year due to slip, trip or fall incidents in Ontario. The numbers for slip, trip and fall claims also remain high in residential buildings; they represent a liability to the boards and can be costly.

An average employee WSIB claim costs \$12,000. This climbs to \$59,000 when you consider costs including lost productivity, incident investigation, administration and staff replacement. This can be costly for Condo Corporations and another prime example of an opportunity for building security teams to eliminate, reduce or provide evidence to defend against incidents.

Pennine Security photographs sidewalk conditions at the buildings they protect on a daily basis.

“The photographs not only serve as evidence of our inspections, but they also allow our guards to positively impact the safety of residents and visitors, while allowing us to identify trip and slip hazards,” explained Williams.

The company’s mobile application, called Safe Buildings, permits Pennine’s security team to digitally track the condo corporation’s daily fire, safety and security checks, with photographic evidence.

“At a time where fraudulent claims may increase, the security industry is responding as fast as the challenges are presenting themselves,” said Reid.

“Evidence of your workplace response to COVID-19 will likely be required in the coming months to defend your building and workplace actions. With advancement in the industry and growth of ROI in condo security, the glass is half full!”

Rebecca Gicante is responsible for Special Projects at the National Life Safety Group, and is certified as a Corporate Wellness Specialist.

