

The Condo Mailroom, the often overlooked Vulnerability

By Kyle Klien, CPP; Security Specialist

I recently read an article about a [Burnaby, BC condominium owner](#) who was using his apartment as an Airbnb. One of his guests vandalized the building's mailbox and stole letters and parcels.

This condominium owner was assessed a \$5,000 repair bill, and over \$2,000 in related strata housing by-law fines.

After an appeal to the Province's Civil Resolution Tribunal, the fines and charges were upheld.

While I unravel the layers to this story, there are many lessons to be learned from all sides.

The lesson for the owner is that he was clearly using his strata housing against the by-law by allowing it to be used as an Airbnb. This, of course, is an easy lesson learned.

From the strata housing side, there is both a positive and negative that sticks out to me. I was impressed to read that a thorough investigation took place. Having a sophisticated access control system to audit the fob use, and cross referencing it with CCTV footage, confirmed who the culprit was, and tied it back to the owner.

It certainly reminds us all how important it is to maintain these important security systems. Security equipment, and the numerous procedures required to effectively utilize these systems, should be reviewed by an independent third party, as a best practice, every 5 years. Call it a security program "health check," if you will. The health check allows the Condo Corporation/Strata to verify it has an "active" security program, and it provides documentary evidence of the preceding fact. The documentation can be kept on file and used when needed.

However, back to this incident... *I wonder how vulnerable the mail room was?*

To be fair, this individual had access to the building, but could there have been other ways to protect the mail room?

I often conduct security "health checks" on condominiums and other residential buildings, almost always identifying the wide open, unsecured, unmonitored mail room that is all too often situated in very close proximity to an entry point.

This story could easily have a very different beginning with the same outcome. In fact, we have numerous incidents well documented right here in Ontario, with people coming in from off the street, recognizing the security gaps of mailrooms, and acting upon them – resulting in stolen parcels, damaged mailboxes, and more.

Condominium boards and strata housing have an obligation to ensure the security of residents' mail and parcels.

Together, we need to work to adopt industry acceptable practices and security standards that allow for better protection of high impact and critical areas to residential buildings.

Having a security health check performed by a board-certified security professional is the first step in identifying the threats and vulnerabilities that your strata housing or building might face.

An independent security review or a security “health check” should be conducted every five years at all condominiums due to the constant changing demographics, environment, risks, trends, and best practices. This allows the owner or owner representative to possess “due diligence” evidence that their physical security program is reviewed (health checked) and updated every five years.

At times, these security reviews are completed in response to a single security incident or a trend of numerous incidents at a building.

While the assessment does not have to be in depth, it acts as a “health check” of your program. This creates an “active” physical security program, and one that is defensible as a good corporate citizen concerned about its property and occupants.

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