



Preventing Water Damage in Townhouses

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One of the easiest ways to minimize water damage in townhouses is to educate owners and residents on how to prevent it so they are more mindful of what is going on in their units. As well as be better able to advise Management when they see water intrusion from the outside. It has worked for me over the years in the various stacked and un-stacked townhouses I have taken over and turned around. It can work for you as well.

Below is a sample notice Boards can tailor to their condominium corporation to help address water damage. Keep the language simple, as English is not always the first language of all residents.

Toronto Standard Condominium Corporation XXXX

Preventing Water Damage

On reviewing the records of the corporation, we find that water damage has been fairly common on the complex and last February (XXXX) was one of the worst months for water damages as temperatures went to minus 20 degrees and be-

low. Over the next few days, temperatures are expected to drop and we are asking each homeowner/resident to ensure their unit is properly heated and to watch for frozen pipes and water leaks. The Board and Management would like to minimize such damages because when they happen, costs come directly from your pocket or indirectly from the maintenance fees you pay. Who pays for the repairs depends on what caused the damage. Generally speaking, the homeowner pays for leaks within the unit and the Condominium Corporation pays for leaks coming from outside the unit.

Know Where Your Main Water Valve Is

Before we explain the various sources of water leaks and resulting damage in any unit, we would ask you to please find the main water shut off valve for your unit. The valve is _____, normally a red handle. Parallel to the pipe is on and when the handle is 90 degrees to the pipe the water stops flowing. Please do a practice run. Go find your valve, turn it off, and ensure your taps around the house

are not giving out water. In the event of a water pipe leak/rupture in your unit, you must immediately switch the main water valve to your unit off. This will prevent or minimize damage to ceilings, drywall and hardwood floors.

Unit Heat Turned Off

Owners sometimes think that they can save money while on vacation by turning the heat off. During winter months, never shut down your heating system before you go away! Eventually, the inside of your home will become the same temperature as outside and water in pipes will freeze. As water freezes, it expands. As it expands, it splits/ruptures pipes. Extensive water damage is the end result. Sometimes the damage is not just in your unit but in your neighbour's as well.

Space Heaters Not Being Used

The same is true for space/baseboard heater. The builder put them there for a reason. For example, many units have space/baseboard heaters along the entrance stairway, with a kitchen sink and dishwasher at the top/side of the stair-

way. There are pipes in the immediate walls and ceilings. If the area becomes too cold, pipes will rupture and cause water damage. Leave your space heaters on during winter!

Frozen Pipes Not Attended To

If you turn a tap on (that normally works) and no water is coming through, while other taps in the house are working, this is the first sign of trouble. It means the pipes leading to that tap have frozen and can eventually rupture. Since all the pipes and taps in the units are the homeowner's responsibility, you should ensure that area of the house has proper heat. If a problem persists, please have a plumber look at the frozen pipe immediately.

Leaking Washing Machine

Recently we were in a rented unit which had a washing machine pump leaking for weeks or months. We know this because it damaged the surrounding hardwood floor in the unit, as well as the ceiling and walls of the unit below. The owner is responsible to repair the washing machine, his hardwood floor, as well as pay the cost to repair the unit below. Routinely watch for signs

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of water leak (mould, warped hardwood floor and baseboards, water, etc.) around all appliances (dishwasher, etc.) in your unit. Check inside of cupboards under sinks as well. If you are a tenant and see a leak, please bring it to the attention of your landlord right away, so it gets fixed.

Washroom Leaks

In washrooms, the caulking around bathtubs deteriorates with time and can let water travel behind walls and down below.

Leaking toilet bowl tanks and overflowing toilets also contribute to damage. Routinely inspect your washrooms including inside the cabinet under the sink to ensure there are no water leaks. These are your responsibility to maintain and fix.

Poorly Maintained Air Conditioners

When your air-conditioner is running during the summer time, they are not properly insulated if the pipes are dripping condensation/water. Your air-conditioner also has a drain pipe to get rid of condensation/water. This pipe should be checked to ensure it is not blocked and is properly centered in the drain. Water dripping around the drain can damage floors and ceilings below.

Satellite Dishes

Poorly installed or removed satellite dishes can also cause water leaks. A satellite dish is held by bolts that penetrate the wall of the townhouse. Such bolts need to be caulked on installation to prevent water leakage into the unit. On removal of a dish the holes have to be sealed to prevent leakage. Repairs to damages caused by poorly installed or removed satellite dishes are charged back to you.



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Please be reminded that satellite dishes can only be installed after receiving written Board approval.

Leaks From Outside Your Unit

Outside leaks can come from balconies, compromised caulking, leaking flash metal joints, poorly installed or removed satellite dishes, window issues, balcony door problems, leaking roofs, etc. It is the Corporation's responsibility to stop water from the outside coming into your unit. If you notice a problem, please bring it to the attention of the Property Manager/Board so it gets addressed.

Leaking Taps and Toilet Tanks

While we are discussing water damage, we should also touch upon water wastage. Leaking taps and toilet tanks create wastage and unnecessary expense. By a leaking toilet tank, we mean the flapper inside the tank is not sealing properly after a flush, resulting in water continuously running inside the bowl. You can visually check for a tank leak, by dropping a piece of toilet paper in the bowl and watch for movement. If the water is moving around, you have a leak. This results in increases

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to maintenance fees. Please help keep costs down by repairing leaking taps and leaking toilet tanks.

In The Event of an Emergency

You can call XXXXXX at XXX-XXX-XXXX and follow the instructions provided. Even after hours, experienced managers are available from 5:00 P.M. to 9:00 A.M. to assist you with emergencies; water damage, fire (after you call 911), etc.

Chargebacks

Our first priority is always to minimize damage. So, if we dispatch a plumber or another contractor to help you in an emergency you will be charged back the service call cost once we receive the invoice. You will also be responsible for the cost to repair damages in your unit or any other unit(s) you may have damaged.

Do You Carry Condominium Insurance?

One question Condominium Managers are regularly asked is whether a unit owner needs condominium insurance. The answer is YES! The Condominium Corporation has insurance for the building, common elements, and some features within the unit itself. But not everything is covered by the Condominium Corporation. You are responsible to insure your personal property and belongings as well as any improvements you made within the unit. You will also be responsible for the Condominium insurance deductible if you caused the damage. The minimum deductible starts at \$2,500.00. If you have a good insurance policy, it may pay some or all of your deductible costs.

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Ensure the insurance broker you use is familiar with condominiums and their insurance requirements.

Should you have any questions, please contact Management at XXX-XXX-XXXX EXT XXX or by email at XXXXXX@XXXXXXX

Yours truly,
XXXX Property Management
Signature:
Date:

Boards and Managers also need to review their approach and thinking on water leaks.

The common approach when a water leak happens is to just fix that leak then wait for the next one. Often there is a pattern, and a more comprehensive approach is best as it minimizes day to day complaints and saves money in the long run.

On taking on a complex which was about twelve years old, a regular complaint I

found myself receiving pertained to water leaks from balconies into garages. The balconies were right on top of the garages and covered by a product called duradeck. Instead of just dealing with one balcony at a time, we brought in the original manufacturer/installer and had all balconies inspected. With some caulking, a few patched membranes and new duradeck laid on a handful of balconies the complaints went away.

As for how we think of water leaks, we may need to think “outside the box” for leaks that keep coming back. I give you two examples each from Condominiums over ten years old.

In the example of one condominium, for years water was leaking through a brick wall into the basement. Previous Management had progressively caulked doors and windows, caulked weeping tiles and repaired the roof over the years. Yet, the leak continued. The one item they ignored was the window on the third floor. By pouring water into the tracks of the window (simulating what happens during a rainfall) it seeped within the cavities of the bricks all the way to the basement. The solution was to change the window as the frame and drain was compromised.

Another example was a roof supposedly leaking into two units. Thousands of dollars were invested, yet the leak was still there when I arrived at the condominium. A different perspective and closer inspection revealed the end cap of the eaves (which was tightly wedged/stopped at the brick wall separating the two units) was missing and it had been like that for over ten years. Simply shortening and capping the end of the eaves stopped the leak.

So there you have it. A threefold strategy to minimize water damage in Condominiums:

- (a) Educate homeowners and residents.
- (b) Find out what is causing frequent leaks. Inspect and fix all units.
- (c) Think “outside the box” for leaks that keep coming back.

When management, boards and homeowners all work together, solutions can be found and money can be saved. **CV**



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