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**Condo Security**

# Tactical Security Advice for Condos

## A Holistic Approach to Protecting the Entire Condominium



Statistics Canada used to compare burglary rates for the various types of accommodation condominiums vs. town homes/duplexes vs. conventional single-family homes. For over 20 years, including their two most recent studies town homes/duplexes were the most burglarized residences by a notable margin. The least burglarized homes were condominiums.

In 2016, Statistics Canada conducted further more in depth research. Condominium buildings with six or more stories have a 60% lower risk of a home burglary than conventional single-family dwellings. When the condominium building has five floors or less, the risk is still reduced, but only to 35% lower than a conventional single family home.

Part of the lower home burglary rate in condominiums, can be explained by the extensive use of electronic FOB or card access, on all ground level and perimeter entrances, suite alarms and the presence of onsite security teams to control access, and patrol sensitive areas such as parking and vulnerable amenities such as party rooms with ground level perimeter

doors. When investigating thefts from party rooms or reports of people sleeping in them we almost always find that, there is a gap between the exterior door and its frame that allows a pry bar to be inserted to force the door open. Where there is a gap of 3mm or more between an exterior door and its frame a steel strike cover plate is required.

### Video Surveillance

Guards usually also monitor any on site video surveillance equipment. Unfortunately, many condominium boards place a great emphasis on having cameras almost everywhere believing that they are a deterrent to criminal activity. Their deterrence value is very limited. In the USA, the Armed Robbery Investigators Association interviewed over 100 armed robbers responsible for over 1200 robberies and found that when choosing a target video surveillance was 11th on their decision tree. VS cameras real value is in giving the police high quality video evidence they need to obtain convictions.

Unfortunately some condominium video surveillance systems are NOT supported

by a maintenance agreements and many images are too fuzzy or have an incorrect date or time. To ensure that your condominiums video records are useful to police please see the list of steps from GardaWorld's Stacy Gallant, which follows at the end of this article. The effectiveness of condominium video surveillance in sensitive or crime prone areas can be improved by converting those cameras to motion activated and directing their images to a large pop up or bump monitor at the security desk. Whenever activity occurs on a camera near for example a theft prone garage locker room its image appears full screen on a large pop up or bump monitor and the guard is alerted and can take appropriate action.

### Parking Area Patrols

Another area where condominiums can improve is in parking area patrols. Most condominiums have their guards patrol parking on foot. A bicycle, when seasonably appropriate, is low cost and allows the guard to patrol quickly while her senses of smell and hearing are unimpeded. There is no distracting AM/FM radio and the guard can smell crack or any

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other drug being smoked in parking. In our experience, the bicycle patrol attracts health conscious guards with lower turnover and absenteeism rates. In addition, the bicycle has a definite “stealth” factor, which makes it harder for criminals to detect them until the guard is very close by.

### FOBs and Access Cards

Another area where almost all condominiums need to improve is the management of the FOB or access card database. When auditing condominiums we often find that there are 25 % or more FOB has or access cards in use than there are residents. Absentee landlords retaining extra cards that they retain for themselves so that they and their families can continue to use the pool, fitness center etcetera, cause some of the excess cards. In our experience, a well-managed access database makes it slightly harder to operate Air B&B in any building.

Where technically feasible we recommend use of Lenovo or CCure access control software. Both systems have the inactive card management feature. Lenovo refers to it as the Use it or Lose it Feature. After

a period during which a card or FOB not being used, selected by management such as 2 weeks, 30 days etcetera both systems will do one or all of the following:

1. Advise the system administrator and/or the condominium manager who can then follow up with the suite owner or resident.
2. Removes the cards access.
3. Convert the card to day time access only until the card holder has spoken to management.

### Suite Alarms

Many condominiums, are built today with intrusion alarm systems already installed. Some residents never use them and a few others use them every day. The most objective study of the effectiveness of intrusion alarm systems was conducted in 2012 by 2 Ph'D students for the American Society for Industrial Security, Criminal Research in Security Perspective (CRISP) report. Using two sets of ALPHA (control) buildings and two sets of BETA (test) buildings in equally crime ridden parts of Philadelphia the PhD students determined that the buildings with intrusion alarm systems were 4.58 times

less likely to be broken into. Also where/when an alarmed building was burglarized losses were lower.

Since in most condominiums residential suite burglaries occur most frequently on the first floor, second floor and top floor these suites should use them on a regular basis. Owners of first and second floor suites should be aware that in both cases the sliding glass door is the primary point of entry.

We know of cases where/when the thief has stepped on top of a wooden privacy fence to access the second floor balcony. Replacing the wooden privacy fence with thorny shrubs that cannot be easily climbed is one option. We have also encountered 2nd floor suite burglaries where/when the resourceful thief has wheeled a dumpster over to beneath a second floor balcony and then used it as an informal ladder. Returning dumpsters to the garbage compactor room as soon as they have been emptied is recommended. Entry via sliding glass doors is best prevented by installing a one-piece folding “Charlie bar” with integral safety chain. (Photo) and round head screws in the



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upper track. They should come within 1 mm of the top of the door when it is in the closed position. This will prevent it from being lifted out of its track by the burglar. Alarm contacts are recommended for the sliding glass door and any other windows that can be accessed from the ground or a second floor balcony.

### Stairwell Access

Our experience in rental apartments both in North West Toronto and Chicago clearly indicates that in those buildings proximity to a stair well is a key factor. In North West Toronto, we have seen apartments with doors adjacent to stairwells with the original lock plus two others. Where/when, there is ongoing evidence that proximity to the stairwells is an ongoing concern in your condominium there are three basic options.

They are:

- (i) Add a U shaped metal door wrap and a high security Medico or Multi-Loc dead bolt to the suite door. High security deadbolts have 1 inch or 25mm bolt through, a cast or machined metal spinner washer to defeat vice grip or

pipe wrench attack, and ball bearings to protect the mounting screws from attack via drilling. Note: Some products resemble high security dead bolts. Unfortunately, they lack spinner washers, and have NO ball bearings to protect the mounting screws from drilling attack. In addition, their bolts can be easily pried back into the lock. The low price of these disingenuous deadbolts is an obvious sign that they are not going to provide much protection from burglars.

- (ii) If the suite door needs replacing we recommend obtaining a folded sheet metal door 45mm (13/4 inch) thick. If the sheet metal is aluminum, it has to be 1.3 mm thick or thicker. If it is galvanized steel, 1mm thick is acceptable. The preferred door if the suite has been burglarized multiple times is a metal door 45 mm thick constructed from sheet 1.63 mm (16 gauge) thick that has 4 U shaped stiffening panels in it. These doors are available from Rivett Architectural Hardware in Kingston for around \$1000.00 CDN.

**Note:** *The following doors are not resistant to forced entry- hollow core wooden doors, particleboard doors, & wooden style and rail aka six panel doors. Metal six panel doors are acceptable.*

### Stairwell Up Grades

If it is obvious that the stairwells are being used by criminals as a method of obtaining access to the suites from the second floor and up consider the following, mostly very expensive modifications:

- (a) **Magnetic Locks:** Consider installing magnetic locks interfaced to the fire alarm system on all stairwell doors. The magnetic locks will release in the event of any fire alarm. Time-consuming fire department approval is required this is extremely expensive likely \$3,500.00 or more per door plus the cost of obtaining a permit to allow them to be installed. Due to the expense, this type of stairwell security upgrade is most often found in AA office buildings and rarely in condominiums.

- (b) **Locking and Re-enforcing the Stairwell Doors:** Install classroom



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function key in knob locksets and steel strike cover plates on all stairwell doors. Persons will still be able to exit into the stairwells but unless they have a key, they will have to exit at the bottom level. Use of classroom function key in knob locksets means the stairwells can be left unlocked for cleaning, movement between floors during religious celebrations; etcetera Fire department approval is required. We estimate this as costing around \$550.00 per door.

**(c) Installing in Stairwell Access Barriers in all Tower Stairwells at the Second Floor:** This is a combination of an in stairwell outward opening panic bar door and in stairwell expanded metal mesh partitions to prevent incoming trespassers from climbing around the door. This tactic is only effective for denying access to criminals who do not use the elevators for fear of being recognized. The effectiveness of this tactic can be improved by installing card or FOB readers in the elevators. However installing card or FOB reader's costs approximately \$20,000 per elevator.

**Video Surveillance Systems Check List**

The following information can help property managers, board members, residents and GardaWorld Guards ensure your video surveillance system is optimized for when it required for an investigation of any type. (Criminal investigation, insurance, accident, review etc.)

These areas are common points of issue found by Law Enforcement when accessing video surveillance that is required to further an investigation:

- **Synchronized Date & Time**  
Very often the system time and date are inaccurate which causes investigators to validate the time or date difference (often times the system is not adjusted for day light savings time or it is not synced with the world clock)
- o Simple fix during initial setup and maintenance. Units over time by their sheer design, lose or gain time - through regular maintenance this can be avoided.

- **Retention Time of Video**  
Longer is always better depending on the system capacity. 30 days is a good target setting
- o Keeping in mind that this directly affects the quality of the video, in some cases buildings are investing in larger Hard Drives(4-8TB) and secondary HD. This allows larger retention periods. In some cases, buildings utilize motion detection in low traffic areas like stairwells. This decreases the amount of footage stored.

- **Secure Accessibility**  
System Manuals, admin passwords, how to download video- Investigative use.
- o It is a good practice to have a key, a password and a contact number stored in a safe area for police or anyone accessing the system. Plus it avoids law enforcement from having to seize or dismantling the system, leaving the location with no active video surveillance system for some period of time.

- **System Settings Documented.**
- o Modern day systems have simple settings interfaces that allow the user to access (admin access) the systems settings and note important things such as time/date settings, number of cameras, recording parameters. Older systems that must rely on invasive examination of the machine to determine the settings.
- o Recommendation in this area is to note any unique settings (motion detection and which cameras, are there any hidden or concealed cameras, any network or cloud based storage info and a log of when the settings or machine was serviced/changed)

- **Invest Wisely**  
Investing in known, industry standard DVR/NVR systems that have proven technical performance specs, this simplifies the analysis and reduces errors, breakdowns, unnoticed recording flaws is preferable. The costs are more but is well worth the investment and safety of residents or your business.

**Video Surveillance System Information**

- Make, Model, Serial Number:

- Date Installed:
- Company Installing System & Contact Information:
- Admin Password on System:
- User Passwords:
- Hard Drive Capacity:
- Retention Setting:
- Recording Settings:
- Map of Camera's locations available:
- Motion Detection Camera locations:
- Additional Notes: **CV**

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