

Your Role in Resident Safety – Safety Awareness Week

Are your residents as vigilant as they should be about safety? No matter how phenomenal your building maintenance, fire suppression and emergency response systems are, resident carelessness can lead to catastrophic problems if left unaddressed. Consider running a safety-awareness week at your apartment or condominium building to help everyone hold up their responsibility for the wellbeing of all in your complex.

General maintenance, emergency preparedness, problem prevention and personal insurance are all areas residents scored low on in a nationwide survey.

Maintenance can include repairing broken locks or windows, checking for and dealing with leaky plumbing, preventing and eliminating bugs, reporting and fixing defective sprinklers or fire alarms, and disposing of fire hazards and chemicals properly. All of these issues, if left unchecked, can lead to dangers within units that can spread to other units or the common areas. An intruder who enters a unit through a compromised window or a ground-floor sliding glass door then has access to hallways and other units that might have otherwise been accessible only through a secure, central entryway. A chronic drip from a leaky dishwasher, sink or toilet connection can, over time, soak through flooring into ceilings and walls below. And we all know how invasive insects can be – if one unit is filthy, it can become a breeding ground for an army of pests that expand their territory.

It isn't unusual for a resident to accidentally damage a sprinkler or fire alarm and let it go unreported. Building maintenance cannot always check every unit every day to make sure fire alert and suppression systems are in working order. If a fire breaks out in a unit whose protection has been compromised but not reported, it can spread quickly, and lives could be at risk.

Many residents also don't have an emergency preparedness plan, so if disaster does strike, they can't respond appropriately or rapidly. Those plans include containing or escaping from a fire, sheltering during a tornado or other windstorm, responding to a home invasion, grappling with a nighttime or extended power outage, and enduring a shelter-in-place order, to name a few. Beyond fire, in fact, lots of emergency situations simply don't cross many people's minds.

Compounding the problem is a lack of renters insurance. While condo owners tend to insure their units, possibly because of building covenants when they buy, many

renters – in fact, the majority in some surveys – skip or aren't even aware of their need for personal insurance for their belongings and liabilities. When catastrophes strike, the uninsured frequently look to building owners for coverage. Denials can lead to hard feelings, lawsuits, vacancy and even malicious behavior.

Promote Awareness

As a building manager or owner, you can combat these problems and promote overall safety for your complex and its residents. Running a safety-awareness week can be very effective when done well. It can include things like posted announcements about safety, flyers containing an emergency response framework and thought-provoking questions, and discount coupons for emergency kits and maintenance services for which occupants are responsible, such as plumbers and locksmiths. And, nothing reminds people of the need for good housekeeping more than a lobby display of insects. Be creative and grab your residents' attention while also providing suggestions and solutions.

Remember to also get your maintenance number into all residents' hands. Refrigerator magnets are a great way to make important phone numbers easily accessible. You can also offer residents information on renters and condo insurance. That might include a free information session with an insurance professional. Talk to your insurance agent about risk management solutions that you can apply to resident safety awareness and start planning a friendly campaign that you can implement this summer.

Share your thoughts or questions!

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