



For More Information

“Managing Major Repairs: A Condominium Owner’s Manual”

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the British Columbia Homeowner Protection Office and the British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs recently published a guide for managing major repairs to condominiums, which served as the basis for some of the information in this brochure. The major repairs guide is filled with comprehensive and practical advice for undertaking a condominium reconstruction project and how to handle condominium association meetings, attorneys, contractors and real estate transactions. Though written for British Columbia residents, much of the concepts and advice may be successfully applied in the United States. You can download a copy of the guide from the Homeowner Protection Office Website at: www.hpo.bc.ca, or order it for \$10 Canadian, plus shipping (about \$10 US total) by calling (604) 731-5733.

“Moisture Control in Walls”

The Buildings Technology Center at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory offers a free program on computer CD (Windows and Macintosh compatible) called “Moisture Control in Walls” that features the basics of moisture transfer, moisture control, diagnostics, remediation, and design. The CD may be ordered by sending an email with your name and address to: jef@cosmail2.ctd.ornl.gov or by calling (423) 574-4345.

Ongoing Research Activities

In addition to this brochure, the Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is partnering with local building professionals, state energy officials, and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory to better understand the causes of moisture damage and premature building enclosure failure in Seattle. As our studies progress, availability of information will be announced through the media, DPD publications, and on our website.

Leaky Buildings and Moisture Damage

a guide for apartment and condominium owners and buyers



For Owners

Take a close look at your building to see if any of the telltale signs of a leaky building or moisture damage are present.

What to Look For

- When it rains the floor gets wet around sliding glass doors; water drips or flows down interior walls, especially around windows and doors; or water is blown through window or door frames
- Mold or mushrooms growing on interior walls or carpets, especially on the inside of exterior walls.
- Mold or moss growing on the outside of exterior walls.
- Cracked or missing caulking.
- Exterior paint bubbling or peeling (could be due to age and exposure, as opposed to moisture damage).
- Water stains evident on inside of walls and ceilings or on inside of a foundation wall.
- Visible cracks or gaps in the exterior cladding that allow weather to penetrate.
- Wind can be felt blowing through the walls, especially around doors and windows.
- Dark, moldy, rotten wood that flakes off when touched or into which a screwdriver can easily be inserted.
- Lack of a regular inspection, preventive maintenance, and rehabilitation program. Or a program that is under-funded, not funded, or not followed.

How to Take Action

If any of these problems are present, you should do something about them immediately. It is in everyone's interest to address a small problem quickly before it becomes a large problem.

1

If you live in a condominium, the first step is to inform your condominium association, which is typically responsible for any problems related to the building enclosure. Problems often first appear on lower floors of a multistory building, or just on the lower floors of one side (the weather side) of a building. Even though moisture damage may be limited to lower floors, especially in the early stages of a moisture damage problem, it is important that the condo association take the problem seriously and act promptly. Where the building enclosure is concerned, a problem affecting one unit affects the entire association.

2
Next, try to determine the cause of the problem. Talk with friends, relatives, and building industry associations to find a reputable contractor, architect, or engineer. Preferably, the building official should be experienced in investigating and proposing solutions to moisture problems.

3
You may also want to contact an attorney to help sort out potential claims. Again, ask your friends, relatives, attorneys, and your building professional for suggestions. Though it is not necessary to hire an attorney, many have found it helpful to have one available.

The problems mentioned above represent a range of causes that can be easily fixed or fixed only with a great deal of cost and effort. An experienced building professional should be able to provide you with examples of the types of problems they have encountered and what it cost to fix each. An attorney can help you understand what remedies are available. The bottom line for the condominium association is to pay close attention to any potential problem and deal with it earlier rather than later.

For Buyers

As a potential condominium or apartment buyer, you have the advantage of statutory full disclosure requirements and institutionalized home inspections to protect your interests. However, prudence dictates that you should do more than rely on disclosure and inspections to investigate the property you wish to buy.

You should start by talking with condominium association representatives and reviewing association meeting minutes for any mention of moisture problems (or any other problems for that matter). The minutes may also reflect how the problem was resolved.

Questions to Ask

Through your investigation, you should make sure the following questions are answered to your satisfaction:

- Has any part of the structure ever suffered moisture damage?
- If so, what was the cause of the damage? Has the cause been eliminated? How was the cause eliminated? Are there photographs showing how the cause was eliminated (before, during, and after)?
- How was the damage fixed? How much did it cost? How much were individual owners assessed to fix the damage? Are photographs available showing the damage before, during, and after it was fixed?
- Were architectural drawings prepared to fix the problem? If so, you might consider having them reviewed, along with photographs, if available.

- Is there a preventive maintenance program? Is it funded? What does the program entail? When was the building last inspected?
- Has mold ever been a problem in the structure or the unit being considered for purchase? If so, what was done to correct the problem (cost, assessments, etc.)?

It is important to remember that moisture damage problems can and usually are successfully corrected. If you are buying into a structure that has suffered moisture damage, is undergoing restoration, or has the potential for a moisture damage problem to develop, your real estate broker, lender, and/or attorney should be able to help you figure out financing arrangements.

Some buyers have negotiated reduced sales prices, while others have negotiated agreements for the seller to place funds in escrow that the buyer may access within a specified number of years should a moisture damage problem develop.

All things considered, the condominium and apartment markets in Seattle are healthy, and willing buyers and sellers are finding ways to make deals happen.