



Yaletown Condo Owners Take Preventative Action Now, To Avoid Potential Headaches (And Owner Health Issues) Later.

The owners were smart,” says Bunny Porteous, Senior Strata Manager for FirstService Residential Property Management. “The Strata Council took preventative action now to avoid problems later.”

Porteous is referring to the Peninsula, a high-end waterfront condominium building in Yaletown managed by FirstService Residential. The moment second-hand smoke problems began, Council got proactive.

“When the Strata Council first asked for help implementing a no-smoking bylaw, I suggested they propose a smoking ban on limited common property (balconies). But the Council decided to propose a ban that prohibited smoking throughout the entire building and grounds, including home owners’ suites and balconies,” continued Porteous. “Council sensed owners would be supportive, and they were right. Seventy five percent voted yes.”

Porteous suggests more buildings should follow the Peninsula’s lead and seek support for a similar bylaw before smoking complaints start. A 10-year veteran of the strata management business, she confirms smoking issues can eat up a lot of staff time, and short of a no-smoking bylaw, are seldom easy to resolve.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If a Council believes ownership would be supportive of a 100% no-smoking bylaw, I say go for it,” she continued. “Besides avoiding smoking complaint headaches, a no-smoking bylaw also reduces the risk of fires, clean-up costs, and I expect could make units easier to sell.”

She may be on to something. Research in Quebec and Ontario on the effect of past smoking on property values may provide clues to the current situation or future trends for BC.¹⁴

In January and February 2013, a survey of 401 Quebec and Ontario real estate agents found that almost half (46%) of the respondents cited smoking in a home as a “major factor” affecting real estate values. In fact, four out of five realtors (83%) believe that smoking inside the home lowers the property value, and 85% of agents said that it is more difficult to sell a home where the current owners smoke.

Health advocates including the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation are just as keen to move the issue forward and help increase smoke-free housing options. “We regularly receive calls from property managers looking for help,” says Sharon Hammond, Manager of www.smokefreehousingbc.ca, a valuable resource for Strata Corporations exploring the idea of going smoke-free.

According to an Angus Reid survey of BC residents living in multi-unit dwellings, while only 9% of condo owners smoke compared to the provincial smoking rate of 14.5%, close to 50% of residents report being exposed to second-hand smoke (SHS) in their homes (2013 Angus Reid Survey). “This means that while the majority of people living in condos don’t smoke, just a few people that allow smoking inside or on balconies can wreak havoc on many of their neighbours,” added Hammond.

“If second-hand smoke could be contained and remained where it was smoked, we wouldn’t receive the volume of calls and emails from residents complaining about smoke infiltrating their homes from neighbouring units.”

Second-hand smoke travels between units through a variety of paths, including from a neighbour’s balcony; through open windows or doors; electrical outlets, cable or phone jacks, cracks and gaps around sinks, windows, doors, floors,

or walls; and through the ventilation or forced air system.

Further, SHS is not just a nuisance to be tolerated because you live in a condo complex. SHS is dangerous to everyone, and according to Hammond, you aren’t being paranoid if you think your health is at risk.

The US Surgeon General’s report on second-hand smoke has concluded that

- There is no safe amount of second-hand smoke (SHS). When you are exposed to a person who is smoking – you inhale the same dangerous chemicals as the smoker.
- SHS has been causally linked to cancer respiratory and cardiovascular diseases
- Breathing SHS is a known cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Children are more likely to have lung problems, ear infections and severe asthma from being around smoke.
- Children, Pregnant women, seniors, and people with heart or breathing problem are especially at risk and should take special precautions.
- Separate ‘no smoking’ sections DO NOT protect you from SHS. Neither does air filters or opening a window.

Bottom line according to Hammond: Smoke-free buildings are more cost effective, safe, marketable and healthy. Plus, it’s win-win. What’s good for resident health is also good for the bottom line.

For info on how to implement a no-smoking bylaw visit: www.smokefreehousingbc.ca. The BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundations (B.C. & Yukon) work together to raise public awareness about the serious health risks of exposure to second-hand smoke and to advocate for smoke-free environments for all workers and the public