



Be Safe. Be Informed. Be Calm.

By Roger Tickner

These six words bring hope and assurance in times of uncertainty: it is also an oft-repeated catchphrase amongst safety professionals and property management when it comes to dealing with the extraordinary and unforeseen nature of COVID-19.



Roger Tickner

The wrath of COVID-19 will continue to have a significant impact on many sectors of society – unlike any other health crisis before. It has left an indelible mark on our work, our state of mental and physical health while ushering in a new normalcy in our day-to-day lives.

Simply put, our post-pandemic lives and workplace will no longer look like the one we left behind.

As we slowly return to work from government-imposed shutdowns and self-imposed lockdowns, most condo boards and property management have resigned to the fact that their new norm must include comprehensive safety

protocols, such as physical distancing, better use of PPE including mandatory face masks, and even temperature checks – a procedure that is already in place at many renovations and new construction sites across Canada – to protect against the spread.

These preventative measures, and others, could be in place for years to come.

When I spoke at an ACMO conference in Burlington earlier this year, COVID-19 was slowly entering our health and safety discussions. It was barely on the condo radar. One month later, during another ACMO speaking engagement in Barrie, the virus was in full swing in Wuhan, China, with the first cases in North America showing up in late January.

During my Barrie presentation, I explained we had already begun planning and tracking the virus two months earlier and had prepared a three-page document on some of the preventative measures people must take to protect themselves.

My, How Times Have Changed

For what feels like an eternity, most non-essential businesses have been closed since April 4, 2020. Non-essential services that were ordered shutdown are now planning for a gradual reopening, but again they will have new health and safety standards in place and a heightened sense of the need to enforce standards.

The silver lining, if there ever was one, is that everybody knows what PPE stands for and the importance of masks, gloves, hand washing and good hygiene practices. This is our new normal. We have to adapt and get used to it.

When we started to put this article together on April 12, according to data, more than 27,000 Canadians had been diagnosed with COVID-19, and more than 950 Canadians had died with the disease. In 23 short days, as of May 6, more than 62,046 Canadians had been diagnosed with COVID-19, and more than 4,043 Canadians had died with the disease. That's more than double the

number of cases diagnosed and a 400+% spike in deaths. As a Safety Professional, this suggests that we still have a long way to go until we reach a herd immunity and a viable vaccine.

Landlords, property managers and directors of condo boards also face unfamiliar risks. There are no exceptions. With property management listed as an essential service, it is even

me for further clarification on what standards she needed to put in place to protect residents and contain the virus's spread at her complex. She knew that she could not leave it up to chance because the issue is not entirely in the hands of the contractor. It was also her responsibility. After our phone call, she was better prepared and acted in a responsible manner, armed with the knowledge

touched surfaces in common areas, including doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, toilet handles, counters, handrails, touch screen surfaces and keypads, is a critical task.

- Organize the building to accept deliveries of essential goods, like medications, for residents to avoid non-essential trips outside.

- Post signage limiting the number of residents allowed in common areas, including laundry rooms and elevators, to ensure that individuals can maintain a two-metre distance.

- If showing units or suites for sale or lease, practice physical distancing – keep a safe distance of two metres from the resident and wash hands with soap and water and or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after the visit. Virtual showings are becoming the norm.

Going forward, risk assessments will need to be a frequently performed function of health and safety in condos.

more critical for condo boards and property managers to understand their roles and responsibilities during these extraordinary times. They also need to understand how prevention works and how to protect themselves.

After all, they are entrusted with the task of making all the essential decisions with respect to the well-being and safeguarding of all its staff, building residents and potential visitors, as well as keeping the day-to-day business operations on track.

At the very least, condo boards should have already implemented new rules along with updating their risk assessments to head off the rapidly changing conditions and consequences of this life-altering pandemic. Going forward, risk assessments will need to be a frequently performed function of health and safety in condos.

Communication Remains Key

Keeping open lines of communication with timely, factual updates gives people peace of mind and eliminates fear, misleading information, and fake news. We need to keep sending positive messages to those glued to their TV sets for updates and the millions of others who are influenced by social media. World leaders do not help either when they defy science and medicine when it comes to the health and safety of their people. Foolishness needs to be ignored and put on mute.

Recently, I had a discussion with a townhome property manager who was concerned about the health and safety suggestions given by her asphalt contractor. She had just attended our Barrie conference and reached out to

and information to act diligently in the face of a silent and deadly illness.

Nobody is expected to be an expert on COVID-19, and it is not really expected for condo corporations to have foolproof measures to safeguard residents, visitors, and staff from the virus's grasp. They just must be able to assess their risk and implement new practices and meticulous disinfecting measures to mitigate this silent threat. It's called being "diligent." If we continue to follow the advice of our health officials, safety professionals and government leaders, we will flatten the curve and put this deadly virus in our rear-view sooner than later.

Quite simply, by working together, by acting sensibly, by putting into practice what reliable and trustworthy sources, including Public Health Ontario, Ontario Ministry of Health, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada or the World Health Organization (WHO) continue to preach hour by hour, day by day, condo boards can be prepared and resilient within their building operations.

The Best Line of Defence

Property managers and directors of the Condo board can fulfil their health & safety responsibilities by taking these basic precautions outlined by (Toronto) public health officials:

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should be available in all common areas that remain open, such as laundry rooms.

- Close non-essential common areas such as bathrooms, gyms, playrooms, playgrounds, and other high traffic areas.

- Routine daily cleaning of frequently

Doing Our Part

Global unity has been unprecedented in the face of this outbreak. Each person has a responsibility to help prevent this pandemic from spreading further. We must all do our part and take this seriously so that we can return to some semblance of normalcy.

We all hope it is sooner than later.

It will be challenging going forward, but we will learn and grow from it. We will certainly find out what we are truly made of. But then again, Canada is an amazing nation.

This unprecedented situation has raised a countless number of health and safety concerns; however, our profession, our government and leaders have been clear from day one that everyone must do their part when it comes to fighting the spread of COVID-19 – individuals, families and businesses.

Yes, we have a pandemic. But this, too, shall pass. ■

Roger Tickner is a Canadian Registered Safety Professional and is the former Chairman of the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals. He is a practicing Paralegal, licenced by the Law Society of Ontario, and an appointed member of the Prevention Council of Ontario. He is President of Tickner and Associates Incorporated, experts in condo and industry health and safety systems for over 30 years. He is a proud member of ACO.

www.ticknersafety.com