Condominium Home Owners Association of British Columbia
Leadership, Education and Resources for Strata Owners Across BC
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Condo Smarts

Headline: BC Fire Code Obligations
Topic: Disaster Planning
Publication / Date: Province, July 3, 2025
Written by: Tony Gioventu

Dear Tony: We received a notice from our fire service provider regarding the Fire Code. Are we to understand correctly that the volunteers on our strata council and owners are the ones who have to conduct routine testing and verify our fire safety system is operating correctly? To begin with, everyone is retired. We polled our owners and no one has any technical experience to determine if the system is operating correctly. Also no one is willing to assume the personal or corporate liability for an error or omission that may occur as a result of managing our system. Here is a direct quote from the handbook we received and the quote from the regulations. *"Ensuring that fire protection systems are inspected, maintained, and serviced in accordance with the plan and the fire code, and where an inspection, maintenance, or testing procedure is beyond in-house capabilities, it is their* (the property owner) *responsibility to have qualified personnel complete the procedure."* We also have the obligation to document: fire incidents, false alarms, fire drills, discharge or operation of fire equipment, training periods, and the name and location of persons requiring assistance (specifing assistance required). As well, we are required to document the minutes of fire safety meetings, which we have never conducted. This is overwhelming for our community and residents are concerned and stressed because they believe we are not complying with the law. Help!

Margery W. Victoria

Dear Margery: I agree it is overwhelming. The regulations are intended to impose 100% of the obligation and liability on the property owners to ensure the fire safety systems are operational and tested; however, the regulation does provide a window to ease the responsibility. If the procedures are *beyond the capabilities of the owners, it is their responsibility to have qualified personnel complete the procedures,* therefore, you may contract out a number of services.

While fire testing and maintenance of a property owner's systems can be contracted to a service provider, your community has an obligation to conduct routine operations for fire safety. To fulfill your in-house obligations, look to the actions only your strata corporation manages. Conduct and report in your strata council meeting minutes when you have any fire related incidents, testing, drills, false alarms, any type of training for council members and most important a documented list of any person(s) requiring assistance in the event of a fire and evacuation. It provides an ongoing history of your fire safety operations and confirms your activity.

An up to date list should be readily available to provide to emergency responders. Insurance policies require property owners to maintain their fire safety systems as operational and meet the regulations. Discuss the scope of your obligations with your service provider. Also, contact your insurance broker to confirm your strata corporation is meeting its obligations for the safety of your residents, and your obligations under the BC Fire Code. There are also consultants in our industry who provide support and assistance to make this process much easier.

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