

Editor's note: Readers are encouraged to ask their most confounding condo questions to our resident condo specialist: Maria Bartolotti.

ASK MARIA

By Maria Bartolotti

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MODERN URBAN LIVING IN CALGARY



THE HOARDER NEXT DOOR

What you can do if you have a hoarder in your condo

Condominium living attracts all kinds of people. The lifestyle it presents of shared living is attractive not only for its affordability, but also for its inherent sense of communal living — it's like living in a small town.

But living in such close proximity does also have its share of problems. One such problematic instance that has piqued my interest lately is that of hoarding.

You may have seen the reality TV show, "Hoarders" which features disturbing pack rat behaviour among people in its episodes. You'd think that such outlandish conduct cannot happen here. Sadly, you'd be wrong, as hoarding does happen in condos and it can be a real headache, even tragic.

Hoarding is described as the excessive accumulation of a large number of possessions. The uncontrolled amassing of everyday things like newspapers, craft items, recyclables that never make it to the recycle bin, and even pets.

It may seem like a harmless quirk, but it can have dire consequences. On September 24, 2010, on Wellesley Street in Toronto, a fire started on the balcony of a suspected hoarder.

The Ontario Fire Marshal concluded that the speed with which the fire spread was fueled by the storage of large amounts of combustible materials stored inside and outside the unit.

That, however, is an extreme case, and the best way to prevent it from happening is to nip any signs of hoarding in the bud. It is important to note that hoarding is a psychological disorder and should be approached with sensitivity. Hoarders do

not choose their lifestyle, but condo residents do have the responsibility to report such behaviour to their board.

So what do you do?

Condo boards must act as expeditiously as possible when compulsive hoarding is discovered. Start with the least intrusive, least costly, and least heavy-handed measures and work up from there.

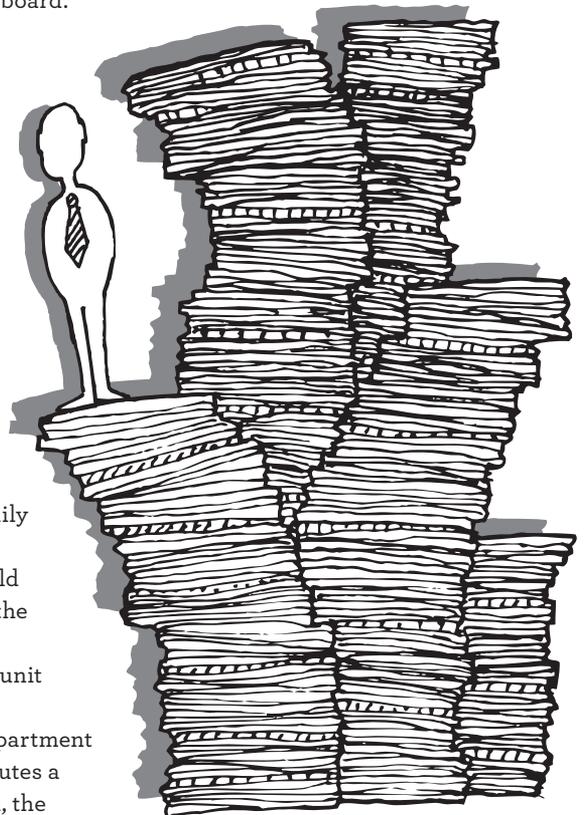
Try talking or sending a letter to the owner first and even offering to help find a clean-up crew, if possible. This won't usually work with clinical hoarders, but it's worth a try. Also try to get family members involved, if possible.

The letter to the owner should provide a date and time when the unit will be inspected by the corporation to ensure that the unit owner has complied.

If necessary, contact the Department of Health. If the clutter constitutes a potential health code violation, the department may send an inspector, issue a citation to the owner and order a clean up, and take further action if the owner doesn't comply. See if other social service agencies can help. From the association's perspective, it is far better to have a third party handle the enforcement.

If the compulsive hoarding continues in the unit, the next step is for the condominium corporation to contact its solicitors to begin legal proceedings.

Until next time... **CL**



Maria Bartolotti is the owner-manager of New Concept Management Inc. She has developed a strong reputation for rendering timely and efficient services to the condominium industry. Maria believes that her company's success hinges on her hands-on approach to condominium management as well as maintaining open lines of communications with her clientele. Maria is actively involved in her industry. For more information, visit www.newconceptmanagement.com