
After exhausting alternatives, Burnaby condo tower bans smoking altogether

“Nothing else worked” says Strata Council President Gudrun Howard speaking about her building’s choice to become 100% smoke-free. “We only rarely get second-hand smoke complaints now, and if we do, having a 100% no-smoking bylaw gives the Strata power to act.”

Howard is referring to Gemini II, an 11-year-old, 135-suite condo tower in Burnaby where she owns a condo and has served on Strata Council for years.

Howard recalls firsthand the many years of smoking complaints, “At first we thought our problems were largely due to people smoking on their balconies. So, after a failed attempt the previous year, owners approved a smoking ban on limited common properties (balconies) in 2008. Unfortunately while it helped, it didn’t solve the problem.”

“Next, we spoke directly with the owners whose smoking was the cause of complaints, but this only resulted in a temporary reduction in amount of hallway smoke,” she continued. “In addition, we sent warning letters, assessed fines and explored ways to help clear the air of smoke, encouraging the use of air purifiers and in one case even offering to provide an air purifier for an owner. Sadly, that didn’t make much difference either.”

“Certainly our biggest hurdle was our building’s ventilation system. It works by drawing stale air out of owner suites, into common hallways. Understandably, if an owner smokes, their cigarette smoke and smells, fast become everyone’s problem,” explained Howard.

“I remember the smell being so strong on one floor it impacted an owner's ability to effectively market and sell their suite. During Open Houses, potential buyers would arrive, step out of the elevator only to turn right back around they were so turned off,” she continued.

“One owner on the floor in question took to wearing a mask to protect herself every time she left her unit. Luckily, it was about this time I spotted a newspaper article about a Lower Mainland Strata which was sued by an owner for failing to protect him/her from second-hand smoke. The ruling agreed with the plaintiff that second-hand smoke issues ultimately compromised the owner’s health and that the Strata Corporation was liable in this case.”

“I was concerned despite our best attempts, we could one day be similarly sued, so Council decided to make the case for a 100% smoke-free building – and in September 2012, our resolution was approved,” said Howard.

On reflection, she believes it was important for the Strata Council to demonstrate the many strategies it had attempted to resolve the problem before proposing smoking be banned entirely – including translating Strata notices into Chinese for the benefit of many Chinese-speaking owners, “By the time we tabled a 100% no smoking bylaw, owners understood we had tried everything and that there was no other alternative.”

“We regularly receive calls from property managers and residents looking for help to address second-hand smoke,” says Sharon Hammond, Manager of www.smokefreehousingbc.ca a valuable resource for Strata Corporations exploring the idea of going smoke-free.

“Not everyone knows it’s legal to adopt a 100% no smoking bylaw. We want to promote smoke-free building success stories, like the Gemini II, to educate strata corporations on the growing number of buildings becoming 100% smoke-free.

Plus, we want to get the word out that while smoke-free buildings protect residents from a known health hazard, they can also increase marketability, reduce conflicts among residents, protect against litigation and human rights complaints, save money on maintenance and eliminate a leading cause of residential fires.”

“It’s win-win. What’s good for resident health is also good for the bottom line.”

For easy-to-use info on how to implement a no-smoking bylaw visit:

www.smokefreehousingbc.ca.

The [Heart and Stroke Foundations \(B.C. & Yukon\)](#) and the [BC Lung Association](#) work together to raise public awareness about the serious health risks of exposure to second-hand smoke and to advocate for smoke-free environments.