



Clean windows reflect on management

BY JENNIFER RUNYAN

The importance of window cleaning is often overlooked when boards and managers allocate condo fees. It's easy to consider the windows and glass panels as purely structural, like the walls of the building; however, glass is a much more fragile material than brick, stone or metal. This knowledge is especially useful today, as many new condos are designed with all-glass exteriors.

The type of glass used for condo windows is highly porous and prone to damage, if not maintained properly and regularly. When exposed to the elements, these pores can accumulate microscopic debris, which, if not cleaned, can stain the surface of the glass. Acid, hard water, pollution, salt, rust, and calcium deposits in everyday air and precipitation can also damage the surface of the glass.

Hard water stains are caused when rain water falls on prefabricated or painted surfaces, then leaches minerals from those surfaces and deposits them on the windows below as these hard minerals run down the building. Acid rain and pollution can leave residues on the glass similar to hard water stains; over time, these acid residues may etch the glass permanently.

Windows that have metal-framed screens are susceptible to rust stains caused by oxidation. When left on the glass long enough, these deposits can be baked into the glass by the sun. Similarly, any animal excrement, when left for long periods of time in the sun, will leave stains which cannot be removed.

These chemical stains and debris can permanently discolour and damage windows, contributing to diminished glass integrity and reduced energy efficiency. When the integrity of the glass is compromised by poor maintenance, the glass' ability to regulate heat gain and loss is diminished, meaning higher heating and cooling costs. If windows or glass panels are already damaged by poor maintenance, there are certain chemicals that can be used to clean some stains; however, once the glass is damaged, it can only be fixed by replacing the glass.

As property managers know, replacing windows and glass panels often comes at a high price. This is why all windows and glass panels should be cleaned twice annually at a minimum. When the building is near an ongoing construction site or the seasonal weather has been extreme, more frequent cleaning is recommended.

When it comes to arranging the window cleaning, it is imperative that a reputable company is used. Window cleaning is a high-risk trade and can be dangerous, not just for the workers, but also for others on the site. Although worker safety is a main concern, workers from qualified companies will be trained in working at heights and the associated safety work procedures. Their risk exposure is mitigated by their experience on the job and adherence to these procedures, including wearing a full body harness that is tied off whenever window cleaners are within six feet of the roof edge, where the parapet wall is four feet high or less.

Often overlooked by property management is the safety of residents, building staff, commercial tenants and the



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Chemical stains and debris can permanently discolour and damage windows, diminishing glass integrity and energy efficiency.



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public who use the grounds under where window cleaners are working. Ontario Health and Safety Act (OHSA) Regulation 159 requires window cleaning companies to post clearly visible signage advising of overhead work beneath any suspended worker or platform. Property management should also advise residents, building staff, commercial tenants and the public against walking beneath workers.

The property manager should always verify a prospective company's insurance and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) status. Recently, the Ontario government, through the WSIB, has introduced Bill 119, which applies to the construction sector and includes high-rise window cleaning. This bill, effective Jan. 1, 2013, makes it mandatory for all contractors, including owner/operator companies, to be registered with the WSIB.

As of Jan. 1, 2014, the WSIB was expected to start cracking down on unregistered operators and the property managers who hire them. Penalties for unregistered contractors are no longer restricted to the offending company; property management is now liable. This means any property manager who hires a contractor or company to do window cleaning without verifying their clearance can be subject to serious fines if the company is found to be operating without clearance.

There is no shortage of companies in the industry that will quote an attractive low price, but property managers should research whether they have the necessary qualifications and experience to get the job done. Property managers should remind board members to focus on safety, resident privacy and customer service when it comes time to choose a window-cleaning company. Property management may unknowingly take on significant risk when the board chooses a company based purely on price.

Should a loss occur on site with a company that does not have proper insurance and WSIB in place, both the condominium corporation and the property management firm may be named in a suit. Whether they are proved liable or not, the costs associated with just defending a claim could be in the thousands. It would then be in the condo corporation's interests to recover these costs through a claim against the property management company, as property management would be the party responsible for not taking the proper steps to ensure the liability exposure of the corporation they are managing. Ultimately, the onus is on the property manager for obtaining proper documentation from the window cleaning company, but the condo board members should be aware of the legal ramifications as well.

An added benefit of regular window cleaning is the image it presents to residents, visitors and the world. Clean windows, just like a well-maintained building, reflect on the property management company. Here, residents can see their condo fees at work. □

Jennifer Runyan, Manager of Triumph Window Cleaning Ltd., has 10 years' experience in Occupational Health and Safety and extensive knowledge of the high-rise window cleaning industry. She has been instrumental in establishing Triumph Window Cleaning, and feels these are the concerns at the forefront of condominium window cleaning today. For more information, contact her at 647-886-2202 or visit www.triumphwindowcleaning.ca.

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