



Water Intrusion... It Happens!

by Michelle George

It's a late afternoon in South Miami at a luxury, beachside condominium, and a resident on the ninth floor is moving out. Somehow, amidst the moving, a fire sprinkler located next to a closet is inadvertently nudged creating a small, continuous leak. For several hours, this leak goes unreported to maintenance and the CAM manager. As a result, the fire safety system is activated and the shut-off feature to the water main for the building is engaged. This unfortunate incident creates a water intrusion dilemma not only on the ninth floor but also several of the subsequent lower floors. In total, a dozen owners and several hallways of the condominium have been affected.

Here is a slightly different situation. In Ponte Vedra Beach in the middle of the night, an owner's water heater pipe bursts. Unfortunately,

the owner did not know how to shut off the main water line into their condominium unit. This timely mistake ultimately results in the unit quickly flooding. Then, the water proceeds to migrate down five additional floors. Six owner-occupied units are affected in the middle of the night.

At some point, most condominiums will experience some kind of water intrusion; whether it's from storm flooding and hurricane damage, fire sprinklers, plumbing, or construction defects. The possibilities are endless but inevitable. If left unresolved, water intrusion can lead to much larger issues such as severe structural damage or mold toxicity.

Here are some tips that can assist in keeping a potential water intrusion to a minimal, less damaging size. Maintenance personnel and managers should perform routine inspections of the condominium's common areas, paying close attention to any signs of water intrusion. In the instance where a unit is only occupied seasonally,



owners should consider leaving a spare key for management or a trusted neighbor. In the event of an emergency, the vacant unit can be accessed quickly. It is also a good idea to ensure the staff is familiarized with operating the shut-off valves located throughout the condominium. The primary goal is to stop water from potentially causing a larger and more severe situation.

Should a situation arise where standing water is discovered it is recommended to immediately call the professionals! A swift assessment with an experienced technician is the most reliable and accurate way to ensure preventative measures will be in place to minimize suffering and further damage to the owners' contents as well as to the condominium structures themselves. This prompt action can make the

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difference between proper mitigation of structural damage and the avoidance of creating secondary damage.

A technician will conduct a complete inspection to locate and determine the main cause and source of the water intrusion. There are a variety of special tools they use to assist them in the detection process. Here is an example of a few of these specialized tools. To measure air moisture count and temperature a hygrometer is utilized. Another type of instrument used is a protimeter—this is a non-invasive, handheld probe that detects surface moisture. In difficult situations, using a thermal imaging camera to detect the path, cause, and origin of the intrusion is necessary. Once the inspection is concluded, an estimate is prepared that reflects the identification, drying, deodorizing, disinfecting, removal, and disposal needed.

The restoration process begins by mobilizing, monitoring, and maintaining desiccant and portable mechanical devices. Proper water removal is the key to a fast and efficient drying process, which in return helps to minimize the water damage to walls, floors, and ceilings. After all the free-standing water has been extracted, the drying process can begin. Depending on the size of water intrusion, dehumidifiers are strategically placed. The dehumidifiers range from a portable size all the way up to large, trailer-mounted unit. The dehumidifier's objective is to reduce the humidity levels and produce dry air, which will assist in minimizing secondary

water damage to the contents and materials. In addition to the dehumidifiers, high-speed air movers are also placed. These air movers will create airflow across the walls, carpet, pad, and furniture evaporating the moisture. The focus should concentrate on safely drying, deodorizing, and disinfecting the areas flooded or damaged by the water intrusion.

It is extremely important that any work performed in primarily occupied units should be done on a "fast track" to minimize the client's liability associated with potential microbial growth where water intrusion has occurred. Depending on the size and severity of the water intrusion, it is important to ensure that a company has an adequate amount of technicians equipped with necessary equipment on their service trucks. This will ensure for a speedy restoration process with less inconvenience, especially for larger jobs.

Water intrusion is a situation condominiums will encounter at one time or another, whether the occurrence is a result unleashed by Mother Nature's fury or simply a minor malfunction, which allows water to creep inside over a slow duration of time. The ultimate goal is to quickly identify the source and cause, which will minimize the chance of further damage.

Michelle George is in the Marketing Department of United Water Restoration Group, Inc. with corporate headquarters located in Ormond Beach, FL. For more information, visit www.UnitedWaterRestoration.com. ■



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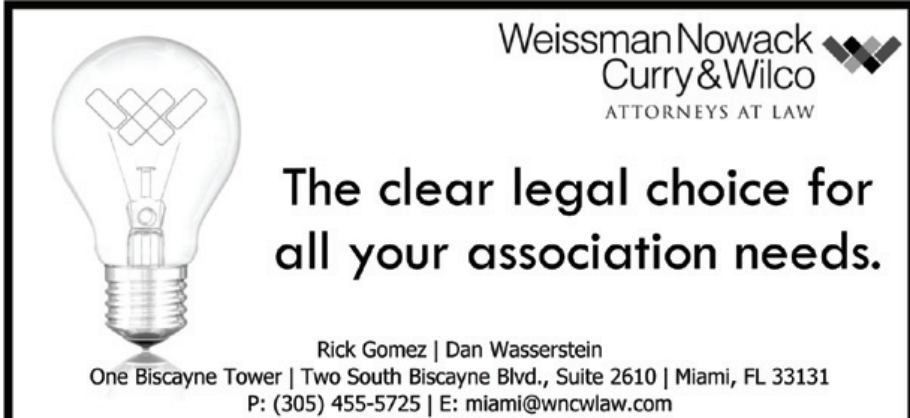
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