

Unmasking the Struggle: Confronting Escalating Harassment and Abuse in Ontario's Condominium Management Sector

Mississauga ON, Wednesday, September 27, 2023 — Condominium managers in Ontario are facing an escalating wave of harassment and abuse from an increasing number of condominium corporation directors and condo owners, contributing significantly to the acute shortage of qualified professionals in this vital sector. This distressing trend is leading some skilled condominium managers to abandon their careers due to the relentless pressure and lack of support. The Condominium Management Regulatory Authority of Ontario (CMRAO) reports that 124 managers, nearly 5% of all General Licensees, chose not to renew their licences as of March 31, 2023 - a 107% increase over 2022. These same pressures and perceptions may also contribute to fewer people entering a viable profession in a growing industry.

The rise in harassment and abuse may be attributed to various factors, including more people working from home post-Covid, the growing number of individuals moving into condominiums due to economic pressures, and the housing shortage. Many of these new condo owners may not be familiar with the intricacies of condominium living, leading to unrealistic expectations and demands put on condominium managers. These individuals often expect the same level of autonomy as living in a single-family dwelling, which can lead to conflicts over shared living spaces and community rules.

“The influx of new owners who are unaccustomed to the condominium lifestyle has created a challenging environment for condominium managers,” says Eric Plant, RCM, Director at Brilliant Property Management Inc. and President of ACMO, *“This has led to an increase in disputes and tensions between managers, boards of directors, and residents, contributing to an unsustainable level of stress for these professionals.”*

Condominium managers report to and serve the condo board, composed of elected representatives responsible for overseeing the condominium corporation's overall management and governance. Managers operate within the terms of the management agreement between the board and the management firm the board hired. Managers play a critical role in ensuring the efficient operation of a condominium complex, managing day-to-day tasks such as overseeing maintenance, repairs, financial administration, and resident communications. However, they do not have decision-making power over policy development, financial decisions, or major property alterations. These areas fall under the purview of the condominium's board of directors. Contrary to popular belief, condominium managers do not wield unlimited power within their positions - they are tasked with implementing decisions made by the board of directors, acting as intermediaries between the board and the owners while following current legislation (i.e. *Condominium Act, 1998; Condominium Management Services Act, 2015*).

Lack of understanding regarding the scope of a condominium manager's authority, condo by-laws, rules, and lifestyle has fueled unrealistic expectations, setting the stage for clashes between managers and owners. Adding to the complex situation, some disgruntled owners have resorted to filing frivolous, unfounded, or vindictive complaints with the CMRAO, adding more stress to managers in responding to accusations and defending their position and diverting attention away from addressing legitimate concerns. Threatening to report a manager to the CMRAO has become a common tactic used by directors and owners to manipulate managers, creating an atmosphere of distrust and further straining the relationship between condominium managers, boards and owners.

“It's not unusual to hear an owner or director try to bully a manager with words like ‘You better listen to me and do what you're told because I pay your salary,’” comments Juliet Atha, President of Best Practices

Property Management. *“This kind of intimidation increases the manager’s feeling of vulnerability and being stressed in their workplace.”*

Condominium managers, who play a crucial role in maintaining the smooth operation of these communities, are increasingly opting to leave the profession due to the sustained abuse, hostility and stress they face. As experienced professionals exit the industry, the manager shortage is exacerbated, potentially leading to inadequate management and decreased quality of life for owners and residents.

Seeking Solutions: Collaboration, Education, and Respect

In response to the rise in harassment and abuse in condos, the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario (ACMO) advocates a multifaceted approach to address the issue and create a more positive and effective working environment within the condominium management sector. This approach includes:

Clear Communication Channels: Establishing clear communication channels with regular, ongoing, effective two-way communication between owners, directors, and managers is essential.

Education and Training: Enhanced education training initiatives and enforcement from the Condominium Authority of Ontario (CAO) aimed at educating boards of directors and owners about the roles and responsibilities of condominium managers. Clear communication about the division of authority and responsibilities can promote healthier working relationships. Meanwhile, ACMO will continue to build on the skills of condominium managers, board members, and the industry at large by providing education on conflict management, communication best practices, and safety & security for the communities they manage.

Supportive Policies: Condominium corporations, together with their condominium management providers, should adopt policies that promote a respectful and inclusive work environment, encouraging open communication and collaboration among all parties. Many management firms have started implementing harassment clauses in their contracts with condominium corporations.

“We understand that our staff can find themselves in situations that are unpredictable. In order to protect our managers, we have added a harassment clause to all of our management contracts,” says Melissa Kirkaldie, RCM, Vice President of Operations, Waterloo Region for Wilson Blanchard Management. *“This clause states that WB is legally obligated to take reasonable measures to protect our employees from harassment that includes oral or written statements, actions or behaviour which is intimidating, threatening, violent, or offensive, and we will limit communications with the offending owner or board member at our discretion.”* She adds, *“As a company, we must ensure that all our employees feel safe conducting business and acting as agents to our clients.”*

Condominium managers follow a strict Code of Ethics as codified in Ontario legislation. Implementing and enforcing a similar Board of Director’s Code of Ethics and an Owners Code of Conduct agreement with residents can provide a framework for appropriate behaviour and expectations and help establish boundaries for a respectful and collaborative environment.

Industry Collaboration: Collaboration between industry associations, regulators, and condominium management providers on developing industry-wide guidelines and standards for respectful and professional conduct can provide a framework for appropriate behaviour and expectations within the condominium management sector.

Towards this, ACMO, along with the Canadian Condominium Institute's (CCI) Toronto Chapter and the Community Associations Institute (CAI) Canadian Chapter, launched a joint initiative earlier this year to develop resources and educational programming and propose legislative reforms to help ensure that the condominium industry is better equipped to manage concerns relating to violence and mental health in communities. Three working committees were formed to address harassment, safety and security in condominiums.

- The Legislation Committee will review appropriate opportunities for legislative reform to better protect personal safety in condominiums and educate government agencies about how best to minimize risk for condominium communities.
- The Resources Committee will identify and promote appropriate mental health resources and conflict de-escalation resources to support condominium corporations in the future. This may include better educating other organizations about the unique challenges in condominiums. The committee may also identify missing resources that should be developed.
- The Policy Committee will review and identify best practices and template policies to improve governance and proactively support condominium corporations.

ACMO is committed to addressing these issues head-on and creating a positive, sustainable environment for condominium management professionals by providing ongoing professional development opportunities for condominium managers and those in the industry, empowering them with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate complex situations, and maintaining a harmonious working relationship with boards and owners.

Through education, fostering open communication, and implementing practical solutions, the industry can work towards creating a more supportive and productive environment for condominium managers, ultimately leading to a healthier and more sustainable environment for managers, directors, and owners alike.

For media inquiries or further information, please contact:

Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario (ACMO)

2121 Argentia Road, Suite 101, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 2X4

P: (905) 826-6890

TF: 1-800-265-3263

F: (905) 607-6172

E: info@acmo.org

www.acmo.org

About the ACMO

The Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario (ACMO) is the voice of condominium management in Ontario and the only professional association solely dedicated to supporting, educating, and promoting condominium managers and management firms. Since 1977, we have cultivated an engaged learning community of more than 1,700 members pursuing excellence in the field of condominium management. ACMO offers a connection to a community where members have opportunities to develop professionally, advance their collective interests, and increase their value to employers and clients. We provide professional designations, continuing education, resources, expertise, networking, and advocacy while adhering to higher standards that go beyond the minimum licensing requirements. We are ACMO – Elevating Condominium Management.