

PROTECTING STRATA COMMUNITIES FROM CORONAVIRUS

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having a huge impact on the affairs of apartment blocks and strata communities throughout the nation as more residents voluntarily self-isolate and work from home.

The pandemic has made high-density living harder in that common areas must be carefully negotiated to avoid potential infection.

Australia's peak industry body for the strata industry, Strata Community Association (SCA), has published best practice guidelines for residents, committees and building managers to make recommendations on how strata buildings can adjust to the situation.

SCA National President Andrew Chambers said the guidelines outline issues such as social distancing, essential services and the importance of cleaning and maintenance.

Strata communities are multi-dwelling buildings where numerous people go in and out of the building daily, touching elevator buttons, front entrance and stairway door handles and amenity room equipment, which can expose residents, employees and visitors to the virus.

"As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, and we know the situation is dynamic, but strata communities have to get on top of the health and safety requirements and minimise the spread to protect their communities," Mr Chambers said.

More than two million Australians live in strata communities and the SCA guidelines for best practice include closure of on-site facilities such as pools, gyms and barbecue areas and social distancing requirements.

The guidelines urge building managers to have a pandemic plan which includes the provision of essential services such as waste collection, cleaning, lift maintenance, utilities, fire safety inspections, plumbing and any emergency works.

It also advises building managers to prepare for a possible building shutdown.

Besides increasing hygiene measures and having a building-wide plan in place, it is critical to rethink how committees meet during this time, as general meetings may have to be held differently and with a shorter agenda due to physical attendance restrictions..

Most States and Territories have legislation which restricts body corporate annual general meetings to face-to-face but SCA is liaising with governments to introduce state of emergency guidelines to enable bodies corporate to postpone these meetings or to conduct them via video conferencing and avoid later challenges of decisions made.

SCA state presidents warned that delaying meetings will only place undue pressure on the industry to try and catch up, plus it would potentially create concerns about unlawful expenditure due to lack of approved budgeting and/or delay essential maintenance.

SCA (Qld) President James Nickless said strata communities play a huge role in the safety and health of people living in the community.

“It’s vital that lot owners and residents have access to the most up-to-date information,” Mr Nickless said. “Strata communities must make decisions based on reliable sources such as the industry body SCA.

“This is a time to put the interests of the wider community and your fellow residents within your strata community first, to help stop the spread of COVID-19. It can be overwhelming trying to keep up with all of the moment-by-moment government updates at Federal and State level and what was permitted yesterday may be prohibited tomorrow.

“Social distancing in multi-owned properties is a unique and complex challenge and it is best to err on the side of caution and safety when dealing with the use of communal facilities. Strata schemes and their committees should ensure that all relevant government directions are complied with on common property.

“Having said that, the aim here should not be just mere compliance, we should be acting reasonably in the best interest and best health of all residents of our strata communities.”

Occupancy in strata buildings is reaching capacity and everyone will be home for weeks or months so SCA is urging residents to be tolerant, considerate of others and kind to each other.

Download the SCA guidelines at:

Building managers - <https://www.strata.community/documents/item/1384>

Committees - <https://www.strata.community/documents/item/1385>

Residents - <https://www.strata.community/documents/item/1386>