

# CONDO LIVING

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## Added insulation won't always solve icicle problem

**Q** The condo corporation where I live has elected to blow approximately 13 inches of fibreglass insulation into every attic. It is hoped this will prevent the formation of large icicles on the eavestroughs in the winter. We are told this should reduce our heating and air conditioning costs.

I appreciate the fact that my heating bills may be less. But I already have insulation in my attic. I believe this additional 13 inches of insulation would not allow me to continue to use this space as storage, but what is of a greater concern to me is that the bathroom fan is installed from the attic, and if the beams are covered by 13 inches of insulation it will not be possible to reach the fan for replacement whenever that may be necessary.

Am I under any obligation to allow this insulation to be blown into the attic, and if I am, what obligation does the corporation have to resolve any problems encountered in replacing the fan if access to it is prevented by 13 inches of insulation?

Does this insulation pose any health problems? Access to the attic is through the hatch in my bedroom. Might there be bits of insulation blowing around the bedroom and might this aggravate my allergies?

**A** *Condo Living sent the question to Martin Gerskup, an investigative architect and building science specialist who is the principal of Best Consultants Inc. He has more than 15 years' experience in the field of condominiums.*

The reader's questions about the blown-in insulation in the townhouse attic appear to be based on concern over replace-

### Ask an Expert

ment of a ceiling exhaust fan and health and not on whether the proposed work will address the problems associated with snow and ice damming.

The board of directors will determine the corporation's responsibilities as set out in the condominium corporation's declaration. The declaration sets out the corporation's responsibilities for the repair and maintenance of all common element components. Common element components are defined as all of the property except the residential units.

Depending on the declaration, the insulated attic, roof and exhaust fan may or may not be considered a common element component. If the insulated attic and roof are considered common elements, the corporation will most likely fund any work relating to the repair or replacement of these components. This may include taking measures to prevent snow and ice damming.

If the exhaust fan was installed by the unit owner and is not a common element component, the corporation is under no obligation to resolve any problems encountered by the owner to replace it. Indeed, if the fan is exhausting warm humid air into the attic it could be contributing to the problems.

Although additional insulation is often thought to be an affordable solution in addressing roof problems, experience has shown that snow and ice damming during winter and the resulting damage may be due to a combination of several build-

ing problems, which result in the melting of snow and the formation of large icicles on the eaves. These problems may include but are not limited to: incorrectly installed ceiling insulation; inadequate roof ventilation; unsealed or missing vapour barrier; improperly installed eavestroughs and poorly installed shingles.

If additional insulation is blown into the attic without addressing the other building defects, the problems associated with snow and ice damming may become worse.

It is recommended that all of the factors contributing to the formation of large icicles on the eaves be identified and addressed in advance of the program of insulating the attics.

Properly installed insulation materials within an attic, separated from the living space below with an effective air barrier, should pose no health problems. However, entering the attic for purposes of storage may expose the owner to unacceptable levels of air borne contaminants including glass fibres arising from any disturbed insulation materials.

Some thermal insulation materials are a potential risk to health and safety. These risks can result from direct exposure to these materials during handling and installation operations or afterwards if the insulation is disturbed. Although the main concerns are with insulation containing asbestos, which is no longer marketed, questions have also been raised over the safety of fibres such as fibreglass insulation.

It is recommended that insulated attics not be used for purposes of storage.