



# PROJECT ACCESS

## POLICE ACCESS TO BUILDINGS DURING EMERGENCIES

### CURRENT SITUATION

The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) often has to attend emergency 911 calls where the responding VPD members are unable to access buildings and the floor(s) where the emergency incident is taking place. Unlike the Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service, the VPD cannot access buildings using the authority of the city of Vancouver Fire By-Law. In addition, the heightened security systems in the newer condominium buildings are a barrier for the police to overcome in order to make entry and attend emergency calls. This places both the safety of people who reside in the buildings as well as the responding police officers at risk. The VPD has launched an initiative called “Project Access” to overcome this barrier so the police officers can access buildings swiftly to respond to emergency calls which endanger the public.

### AUTHORIZATION

VPD members act under, and are subject to federal, provincial, municipal laws. During an emergency, police officers have the authority to enter a private dwelling under common and case law to protect life and property.

The police are permitted to make a forced legal entry into private premises, including a dwelling house, without a warrant, if the following preconditions are met:

- The officer has reasonable grounds to believe an emergent situation exists involving:
  - a) Preservation of life, or
  - b) Prevention of serious injury; and
- Proper announcement is made prior to entry, including:
  - a) Notice of presence
  - b) Notice of purpose,
  - c) Notice of authority.

\* In extreme and rare instances, announcement is not tactically feasible.

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## AUTHORIZATION CONT'D

This principle applies to circumstances involving the prevention of an offence likely to cause death or injury. It also applies to situations where the police need to enter a private premise in order to prevent death or further injury after an offence has already occurred. The police must be able to articulate the reasonable grounds upon which they acted.

The Supreme Court of Canada has also acknowledged a police officer's duty to check on the health and safety of persons who make a call to 911. The importance of the police duty to protect life warrants and justifies a forced entry into a dwelling in order to ascertain the health and safety of a 911 caller.

**Authorization in these circumstances does not provide authority to force entry into private premises for the purpose of simply pursuing an investigation.**

## SOLUTION

The VPD is proposing that the property manager and/or the strata corporation of each building voluntarily provide access to the police during emergencies. The VPD would provide the administrator of the building's intercom panel a telephone number to be programmed into the intercom's directory under a secure code. Upon arriving for an emergent call the police would enter the code and the intercom panel would dial to

E-Comm, the call dispatch center for police, fire and ambulance services. The E-Comm operator would authenticate that the person entering the code is a police officer on an emergency call and then grant access to the public spaces of the building such as the lobby, elevator and floors of the building. The solution is cost-effective and can be implemented immediately upon entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Vancouver Police Board and a strata corporation.





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## TERMS OF USE

The terms of use by the VPD under an MOU with a strata corporation would be strict and must be documented and approved by a supervisor. Under this program the police are only being granted access to the common area(s) of the building. They would still have to comply with the laws with respect to entry to any of the private dwellings in the building.

The following are examples of when this procedure would be used:

- Hang-up 9-11
- Domestic Disturbances
- Home Invasions
- Weapons calls
- Suicidal Person calls

Examples of when this procedure would not be authorized:

- Break and enter report without a suspect
- Surveillance
- Warrant arrests
- Curfew checks
- Noise complaints

In summary, Project Access is a public safety initiative that will allow police to access common areas of buildings during an emergency call for service. The access will be subject to law and will be limited and regulated through a MOU between the Vancouver Police Board and a given strata corporation.



For further detailed information on this program please email [projectaccess@vpd.ca](mailto:projectaccess@vpd.ca) or call 604-717-2777