

# OIB Condominium Managers Discuss How To Get Air Handlers Out Of Flood's Way

BY SUSAN USHER

Bringing condominium complexes into compliance with a new rule aimed at reducing repeated flood-related losses won't be as painful as some Ocean Isle Beach residents first thought.

Building Inspector Druid Roberson will be meeting with management of each condominium to develop a site-specific plan for installing replacement air conditioning units on elevated stands. No plan, no replacement permit next season.

Ocean Isle Beach participates in the National Flood Insurance Community Rating System program. By taking actions from public education to risk reduction, the town makes it possible for all its property owners to qualify for discounts on federal flood insurance policy premiums.

To keep its present 10 percent discount or to qualify for a better rate, the town had to devise a plan for reducing its rate of repeat losses. Repetitive losses are when a property owner files insurance claims more than once for the same type loss, as when an air conditioning unit is flooded out by two storms in a row.

The 70 to 80 repetitive losses at Ocean Isle Beach were "by and large" outside heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) compressors damaged by flooding more than once, perhaps in Hurricane Hugo, Hurricane Diana and the January 1987 winter storm.

"Some of these houses are on their fourth free air compressor," Roberson told a group of mechanical contractors and condominium property managers or homeowners representatives at a town hall workshop.

Attempts to elevate units as broken ones were replaced this past tourist season left vacationers, contractors and property owners alike hot when the power was turned off long enough for a stand to be built and the unit relocated.

Town officials and property owners don't intend to allow the same thing to happen next summer.

Ocean Isle Beach already requires new and replacement HVAC units for single-family homes to be raised. By next summer, it wants to make sure that anytime HVAC units that serve condominiums are replaced they too go "up in the air" above base flood elevation or the first finished floor, whichever is lower.

Next week commissioners are expected to adopt a resolution that requires, by May 1, each condominium property owners association to have designated where the HVAC units will go and either have built a tower to hold them or filed an approved plan with the town for contractors to follow.

Like other coastal communities in North Carolina, until 1985—after an inspection by federal officials turned up extensive violations all along the coast—Ocean Isle Beach had not required property owners in flood zone areas to elevate heating, ventilation and air conditioning units where they couldn't be reached by flood waters in a major storm. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advised in 1985 that had been a requirement of the flood insurance program from its beginning, but apparently North Carolina hadn't enforced it. FEMA didn't cancel the communities' eligibility for the flood insurance program, but made it clear towns needed to address the problem.

Property managers who participated in last week's workshop were concerned that some sites, like a Place At The Beach and Starboard By The Sea, would not have anywhere outside the buildings to move the units if necessary to obtain the proper height. Some were concerned about increased liability by having mechanical contractors working on elevated stands.

Most left confident their specific properties could be brought into compliance with few problems. Just how much the units must be raised depends on the flood elevation at each site. The height could vary from building to building, raising questions about appearance as well as space needs.

John Orton, who manages property for seven condominium homeowners' associations, said the new regulation isn't a big deal. He's already at work bringing all his properties into compliance. He's advised all seven groups that for the sake of appearance and lack of confusion, all HVACs will be placed on stands of uniform height throughout a complex, based on the highest elevation required of any unit. He's finished one site and has started another, with the goal of having all work done before the summer season so air conditioning units can be replaced quickly, without ruining anyone's vacation.

"That's the only way," he said. "Just to tell them how it's going to be done and do it."

Homemakers Set Awards Day October 14

The Brunswick County Council of Extension Homemakers Association, Inc., will hold its annual achievement awards program Friday, Oct. 14, at 1 p.m. in the Lockwood Folly Community Building on Stanbury Road in Supply.

Both individual members and extension clubs will be honored for their achievements during the past year and an outstanding club and an outstanding member will be chosen.

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**Stroke Support Group To Meet**

The next meeting of the Stroke Support Group of Grand Strand Regional Medical Center is scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 26, at 3:30 p.m. in the hospital's classroom.

The group serves as an educational forum and support system for stroke sufferers and their relatives or caretakers. It is free and open to the public.

Meetings take place regularly on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 3:30-5 p.m.

For more information, call Bob Clancy at (803)249-6134.



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