Insurance Surveys: Your Risk Management Consultation

By Nishka Anderson, Vice President of Underwriting and Branch Manager

A loss control survey is more than an insurance requirement. It is a risk management consultation that can help identify conditions affecting resident safety, shared property, and future insurance options.

A risk management consultation

A condominium association manages shared property and shared risk. A roof leak, impaired sprinkler system, damaged handrail, or weak contractor controls can affect many owners at once. A loss control professional provides an experienced, independent review of the property and its safeguards.

Loss control professionals evaluate many properties and see the conditions and practices associated with fires, water damage, liability claims, equipment failures, and other costly losses. Their purpose is to help identify vulnerabilities and strengthen controls before a loss occurs. The best outcome is not simply a clean report. It is a safer, more resilient, and better-managed community.

Cooperation produces a better survey

The most useful surveys are collaborative. Boards and property managers should openly share relevant information about:

- Maintenance programs and service records
- Prior losses and corrective actions
- Planned repairs, capital improvements, and building system upgrades
- Operational challenges and known safety concerns
- Areas where temporary controls or longer-term solutions may be needed

The more relevant information the consultant receives, the more targeted and practical the recommendations can be. Open communication also helps distinguish an isolated concern from a larger maintenance or management issue.

Prepare for the visit

The scope varies by property and insurer, but a condominium survey may include building construction and use, roofs, plumbing, electrical and heating systems, fire protection, exits, stairs, walkways, lighting, parking areas, pools, playgrounds, contractor controls, maintenance practices, and required inspection records.

The consultant cannot evaluate what cannot be accessed. Mechanical rooms, roofs, attics, electrical rooms, records, and a knowledgeable representative should be available during the visit.

What underwriting sees beyond the photographs

A report documents physical conditions, but it also shows how the association manages risk. Underwriters look for clear responsibility, regular inspections, documented repairs, qualified vendors, open communication, and prompt action when a problem is identified.

One repair item may be manageable. A pattern of deferred maintenance, missing records, delayed access, repeated extensions, or unsupported assurances is more concerning because it suggests that other problems may also go unnoticed or unresolved.

Recommendations provide a roadmap

Recommendations are made based on loss experience and recognized risk management practices. They may address fire protection, water damage prevention, maintenance procedures, life safety, contractor controls, or other property-specific concerns. Their purpose is to reduce the likelihood of a loss or limit its severity.

Implementing sound recommendations can help reduce the likelihood and severity of losses, limit disruption, improve continuity, and better protect the association's property. Stronger controls generally support better outcomes.

Not every recommendation carries the same urgency. Some improve an otherwise acceptable property. Others address conditions that could contribute to serious injury, major property damage, or failure of an essential safety system. These may be identified as critical, priority, or mandatory, depending on the insurer.

Deadlines are not starting dates

The hazard exists when it is observed, not when the response is due. Waiting until the deadline can leave too little time for bids, permits, parts, funding, or board approval. It can also affect an underwriting decision that may be made before the policy expires.

If the association disagrees with a finding, it should respond promptly with facts. Useful support may include photographs, service records, permits, a qualified contractor's written opinion, or a reasonable alternative control. Silence or a general promise does not resolve the concern.

Document the correction

A statement that work is complete is usually not enough. Evidence should directly address the recommendation and allow another person to verify the correction. Depending on the issue, this may include:

Dated photographs showing the location and full correction. Invoices or contractor statements describing the work performed. Service reports, permits, inspection tags, test results, or maintenance logs. Written procedures identifying responsibility and ongoing monitoring. A clear schedule and temporary safeguards when final work is not complete. Good records support the insurer's review and help future board members, property managers, contractors, and owners understand what was found, what was completed, and what still requires attention.

Better-managed risks have more options

A satisfactory survey does not guarantee renewal, lower premiums, or unchanged terms. Insurers also consider claims, property values, location, occupancy, pricing, and available capacity. However, proactive maintenance, strong controls, and timely completion of recommendations can support underwriting confidence and make the property more attractive in the insurance market.

Serious or unresolved findings may lead to requests for more information, a follow-up survey, different deductibles, coverage changes, higher pricing, conditions for renewal, or a decision not to continue coverage, subject to the policy and applicable law. Open critical items may also make replacement insurance harder or more expensive to obtain.

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A practical plan for boards and property managers

1. Assign one coordinator. Give one person authority to schedule access, gather records, track corrective work, and communicate with the agent and insurer.

2. Prepare and cooperate. Provide access, records, loss information, planned improvements, and a knowledgeable representative.

3. Review the findings promptly. Correct factual errors and assign an owner and completion date to every recommendation.

4. Address severity first. Do not close several minor items while leaving the condition with the greatest potential for harm unresolved.

5. Communicate obstacles early. Explain delays involving permits, parts, funding, contractors, or board approval, and identify temporary safeguards.

6. Submit organized proof. Respond by recommendation number and include clear evidence for each completed item.

A partnership in loss prevention
The most successful associations view the survey as an opportunity, not merely an obligation. The survey provides an extra set of experienced eyes, an opportunity to learn effective risk management practices, and a chance to address vulnerabilities before they become claims.

Prompt action protects more than the insurance policy. It helps protect residents, shared property, the association's finances, and future insurance options. The value of the survey is realized when findings are understood, prioritized, corrected, and documented.

Note: Survey requirements and underwriting outcomes vary by insurer, policy, jurisdiction, and the facts of each risk. This article is provided for general informational purposes only and reflects general risk management and underwriting perspectives. It is not intended as legal, engineering, insurance coverage, or other professional advice, and should not be relied upon as such.

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7. Make improvements permanent. Add recurring inspections, testing, and maintenance to the association's normal operating plan.

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