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SOLVING NEIGHBOURHOOD PROBLEMS

Series: Solving Neighbourhood Problems

Part 6 of 12: Water, Drains and Swimming Pools

In a strata community, where there is common water metering, each owner will usually be levied a proportional amount for water usage. The water usage is for lots and the common property. An owner of a tenanted lot may not recover the water and drainage charges for the tenant unless there is separate water metering for the lot.

There are obvious things you can do to save water on the common property, including installing water tanks to catch water off the roof for watering common property gardens and lawns and fitting water efficient taps to common property outlets. Even just fixing a dripping tap will make a difference to your bill and the environment. The installation of water tanks may require council approval and must be authorised by a special resolution of the owners corporation.

The problem comes when you try to impose water efficiency standards within lots. Recent studies show 39% of all water used and metered within an owners corporation is used by lot owners in taking showers. Rules for short showers are not likely to be popular or upheld! You might however consider a rule to compel the installation of water efficient taps and showerheads. While such a rule hasn't been tested in the courts and may not be enforceable, it may provide an incentive for owners to undertake such an installation.

As to drains, each lot owner or occupant owes the others a duty not to do anything that might cause a blockage. Lot owners who have an apparatus that provides an exclusive benefit, are solely responsible for its maintenance, including the prevention of leaks and clearing blockages as required.

Swimming pools on common property result in a particular responsibility to users and neighbours to ensure they are adequately kept and fenced to guard against dangers for local children. Each state and territory has its own laws about swimming pool safety. Famously, the owners of a motel were held liable for a breach of safety legislation when a 13 year-old boy was electrocuted while trespassing and using the pool at night with his mate. He was a known offender and stepped on an exposed pool filter wire when retrieving a ball he and his mate were throwing in the pool.

Managing water in the urban context is not without its problems and care needs to be taken to ensure it is used wisely and safely.

Next Week: Part 7—Building and Development