

## Case Study

# Luxury high-rise manager tracks avoidance of several disasters, sleeps easy with wireless water leak detection

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## Leaking havoc

Many multi-level apartment owners and managers feel the pain: "There is no worse feeling than walking into your office on the ground floor and seeing collapsed sheet rock from the ceiling," explained a general manager for a luxury high-rise building in the heart of San Francisco. Then, he says, comes the urgent and expensive question: Where did *THAT* come from?

Such was the case when a leak, concealed behind a wall in an unused guest bathroom, spilled onto other levels from the 10th floor, destroying three apartments and causing damage to a dozen more before being discovered and contained. It took several years for a multi-million dollar settlement and all insurance pay-outs to be finalized. "Leaking water creates the same havoc that any other emergency situation does," the manager noted. "It's fraught with the same emotional distress, dislocation, litigation and all the problems that come with classic emergency events."

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## Wireless water detection

After suffering the disastrous incident, the high-rise manager explored leak detection options, from running monitoring cables to re-piping or designing a fully custom system. "Everything else involved construction or de-construction in every apartment," he said. Then, he found wireless water leak sensing from The Detection Group based in Palo Alto, California.

After installing and relying on an integrated automatic system for several years, administrators and residents are enthusiastic about the results. "The Detection Group changed the way our building is managed," the general manager said. "We have gone from experiencing routine or catastrophic leaks to fixing little drips from ice makers and faucets before they blow out to a real problem." Owners also love it, he reported: "They know a \$500 faucet is a different deal than a \$20,000 kitchen floor."

## Avoiding the cascade

During the first several years following sensor use, high-rise personnel caught more than 100 water leaks, of which at least five carried the potential to become full-scale disasters, according to the manager. "The Detection Group turns a fiasco into a totally manageable maintenance item," he reported. "Before, we thought in terms of great big leaks. After having the system, we see managing small leaks is invaluable in the real world."

For example, following notification of a leak, the manager caught a slow drip from a solder joint to a boiler in a penthouse apartment. "At that time it was no big deal. We cleaned it up with a couple towels," he said. "However, if we had not had the system and three months went by, that small leak would have become a huge cascade of water." Furthermore, he added, "If we had waited until we saw the leak visually, we would have had a room full of mold as well."





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## Achieving return on investment

Joints fail. Leaks happen, especially given the life-span of large buildings. The reality builds a case for efficient return on investment, according to the manager, who noted any building should expect several water issues over several years, amounting to millions in repair. "If you compare that to a one-time, upfront cost and easily manageable monthly fee, the detection system is just not that much money ... it's virtually nothing compared to the benefits."

In total, the benefits reach far beyond financial payback: Without a single catastrophic water event since the installation of sensors, the manager and owners continue on with life, avoiding the interruption of relocation, clean-up and re-building due to water damage. "I go to sleep every night knowing when I go to work the next day I won't have a giant disaster waiting for me ... If something does happen, we know it before the resident knows it." While his building still experiences leaks, with reliable technology and "truly great service from The Detection Group," fixes are straight-forward. "The ability to get on top of small leaks before they become disasters has a payoff that's invaluable."

## Fast, easy installation

Placing and linking close to 800 sensors in his mid-century high-rise proved fast and easy, according to the manager: "The Detection Group sensors went in beautifully and were functioning as they were installing it. Nothing else came close in terms of immediate efficacy and ease of installation in an as-built structure."

Existing buildings are often a combination of remodels, adding lateral lines and connections alongside existing pipes and structures. The Detection Group handles it all. Still, in an exclusive property with apartments extraordinary in both design and materials, owners were initially reticent to allow placement of sensors in their unique homes. Once installed, however, sensors are invisible to the untrained eye, the manager reported. "Now, the system is universally well-received."

Especially when the results of life without water leak detection can be observed so close to home. "I see the giant restoration truck at the building next door once every 18 months," the manager sighed. Built on a hillside, water spills down whenever a water heater blows out, he noted. "I have to swerve my bike around the clean-up trucks, and think, 'It happened again!'"

