Lack of supply likely to keep rental vacancy rates depressed in 2020

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) just released rental vacancy rate report for 2019 paints a very grim picture of the health of Canada’s rental market.

According to the report, the vacancy rate for purpose-built apartments for the country declined from 2.4% in 2018 to 2.3% in 2019, a 17-year low. At the same time, the average vacancy rate for rental condominiums in the seventeen centres surveyed by CMHC declined to just 1.0% from 1.4% in 2018. Given the extremely low vacancy rate for both purpose-built and rental condominium apartments and the fact that median rents of purpose-built apartments in urban centres with more than 10,000 in Canada increased by 5.2% in 2019, their fastest rate of climb since 1991, it is clear that the country has a significant shortage of purpose-built rental accommodation.

With a low vacancy rate, a low turnover rate and a very high year-over-year increase in average rents, Ontario and British Columbia are exhibiting evidence of an acute shortage of rental apartments. Other provinces with a significant lack of purpose-built rental space reflected by a low apartment vacancy rate include Prince Edward Island (2.1%), Nova Scotia (1.4%) and Quebec (1.8%).

In the above-noted provinces, the drop in apartment vacancy rates is due, in large part, to an inflection in the rental market as demonstrated through a record inflow of international migrants. Over the past 24 months, Ontario has become home to an unprecedented 414,000 international migrants plus an additional 20,000 migrants from other provinces. Despite this record inflow of individuals, only 80,000 new row and apartment dwelling units have been added over the past 24 months, of which an estimated 11,500 are purpose-built rental.

In light of this meager increase in the supply of multi-family dwelling units relative to the increase in population, it is not surprising that average rents in the province increased by a 30-year high of 6.2% to $1,277 in 2019 after posting a rise of 5.0% in 2018.

Across the province, a reflecting a near-record low apartment vacancy rate of 1.5%, average rents in the Ontario portion of Ottawa-Gatineau increased by a province leading 8%. Despite a 25% drop in row and apartment dwelling completions and an insignificant (0.8% y/y) increase in purpose-built rental units, Toronto’s apartment vacancy rate edged higher to 1.5% in 2019 from 1.0% in 2018. However, the fact that median apartment rents increased by a record high of just over 7% in 2019 is a clear indication that Toronto has a significant shortage of affordable rental accommodation.

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Work equipment can cause serious work-related injuries and even death. To protect both operators and those working near equipment, regulations under Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act require workers to be trained and competent. To help meet this essential need, the Workers Health & Safety Centre (WHSC) has developed a comprehensive suite of equipment training programs for worker operators.

**Training participants benefit from:**
- Engaging and relevant classroom sessions created for the adult learner
- Pocket-sized manuals for easy reference on the work site
- Wallet-sized records of training.

Just as important, each participant must demonstrate the principles they have learned to safely operate the applicable equipment.

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New hardhat tech designed to protect the brain from all angles

Grant Cameron

Two Swedish companies have put their heads together and come up with the world’s first brain-protection hard hat. Industrial safety firm Guardio and MIPS AB, a company that focuses on science-based product development for helmets, have partnered to produce a hardhat that takes head protection to a new level.

The Armet helmet, as it’s known, is in the process of being certified for the Canadian market and distributors are being lined up. It is based on Multi-directional Impact Protection System, or MIPS technology, which has been developed by leading brain surgeons and scientists, and is designed to reduce rotational forces to the head and injuries to the brain that can be caused by angled impacts to the skull.

Research has shown that rotational motion can increase the risk for minor and severe brain injuries. MIPS uses a slip-plane system that literally moves inside the helmet, mimicking the brain’s own protection system. The system can reduce the harmful rotational motion transferred to the brain by an impact.

By developing the Guardio ARMET helmet in collaboration with the MIPS team we ensured that we could offer the market a unique product that is based on scientific research that is proven to reduce the risk of brain injuries and, by that, hopefully elevate the safety at construction sites, says Guardio CEO Nawar Toma.

Guardio was looking to raise the level of safety equipment for customers and MIPS had the technology. “We were already developing noise-canceling headphones for industrial use and wanted to develop a safety helmet that could be used together with our head-phones,” says Toma. “When we decided to investigate the possibilities to develop a new safety helmet we realized that there was no one on the market offering a MIPS-enabled helmet for the heavy-duty industry. Despite that, several third-party test reports showed that MIPS-enabled helmets in the fields of sports most often was evaluated as best-in-test.”

Guardio contacted MIPS to see if their technology could be used in a heavy-duty helmet to reduce the risk of brain injuries. By that time, MIPS had already conducted several tests that showed it does make a difference.

“Out of head-related injuries at a construction site, 30 to 40 per cent relate to traumatic brain injuries,” says MIPS CEO Max Strandwitz.

MIPS technology has been around since the mid-90s when Swedish neurosurgeon Hans von Holst began to study helmet construction. He partnered with Peter Halldin, researcher at the Royal Institute of Technology, and they formed MIPS AB with three specialists in the biomechanical field from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. The company is focused on improving the safety of helmets. MIPS CEO Max Strandwitz says the company looks at relevant injury criteria to better understand the types of accidents that occur in certain types of activities before developing solutions in specific areas. Based on the data and information, the company can then model the impact with an MIPS low-friction layer.

Strandwitz says accident statistics have been a very important factor in helping the company better understand situations at a construction site.

“One of the most important findings in the statistics is that out of head-related injuries at a construction site, 30 to 40 per cent relate to traumatic brain injuries,” he notes. “The inclusion of MIPS is an important factor of decreasing the risk for brain trauma.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the construction industry has the greatest number of both fatal and non-fatal traumatic brain injuries, and from 2003 to 2010, 25 per cent of all construction fatalities in U.S. workplaces were caused by a traumatic brain injury.

An MIPS-equipped construction helmet looks almost identical to a non-MIPS helmet except for on the inside where there is a thin yellow liner beneath the pads. From the outside, the only indicator that the helmet is any different to one without MIPS is that some brands have a small yellow MIPS logo on them.

The secret behind MIPS-patented technology comes from the human brain. The brain has its own little buffer, called the cerebrospinal fluid. MIPS mimics the brain’s own way of protecting itself by giving the MIPS-equipped helmet its own low-friction layer and slip-plane system between the helmet and the head. The layer enables a relative movement of 10 to 15 millimetres between the head and helmet in any direction at the brief moment of angled impact.

Toma says the most unique feature of the helmet is the fact that it aims to reduce rotational motion and the brain from angled impacts, but that is not all.

“We have focused a lot on the ergonomics of the helmet to ensure that the helmet is comfortable to use even during long working days. The product is well ventilated, light-weighted and the design is slim. In addition to that, we have chosen to use ABS for the outer shell and an EPP layer on the inside to ensure durability, comfort and a premium-quality product also when it comes to the materials used.”

The hardhats range in size from 53 to 61 centimetres in length, weigh about 390 grams and come in a variety of colours. MIPS AB previously launched bicycle and motorcycle helmets in 2007 and has sold more than nine million systems to more than 78 helmet brands.

For more information on the helmets, visit www.guardiosafety.com.
IHSA is pleased to announce *Entry Level Construction*. The course provides general information on hazards and hazard recognition in the construction industry, with a focus on occupational health and legal implications of health and safety. Participants will learn how to prevent injuries and fatalities as well as how to protect themselves on construction jobsites.

Topics include:
- Legal Framework
- Hazard Identification and Control
- Occupational Health
- Personal Protection Equipment
- Fire Protection, Emergency Procedures, and Injury Reporting
- General Site Conditions
- Fall Protection
- Ladders and Work Platforms
- Electrical Hazards
- Materials Handling and Hoisting & Rigging
- Mobile Equipment and Vehicles
- Common Tools in Construction

*In 2016, the Chief Prevention Officer (CPO) released and consulted on a draft program standard for Construction Health and Safety Awareness Training. IHSA’s *Entry Level Construction* course aligns with each of the learning outcomes established in the CPO draft standard.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND
Anyone considering entering the construction industry or construction workers new to their job or trade.

Future site supervisors may also benefit from taking this course.

PROGRAM DETAILS
Duration: 2 days
Maximum Participants: 20

PRICE AT IHSA FACILITY
IHSA is offering this course FREE to members who register to attend at an IHSA facility.*
Non-Members: $85

PRICE AT YOUR FACILITY
IHSA can also deliver this course at your facility.
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*This promotion ends autumn 2020.

For more information visit IHSA.ca

**Register** today or schedule training at your facility
Contact IHSA at **1-800-263-5024**
IHSA rolls out new two-day, entry level construction safety program

DAN O’REILLY
COMMISSIONER

In the wake of the 2009 swing stage accident in Toronto which killed four workers and following an expert advisory panel report on occupational health and safety, a draft standard for entry-level safety training was developed by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA) and construction industry partners.

As that standard, mandatory entry level for construction, is still with the ministry, the IHSA has taken its content and created its own entry-level construction program. The two-day program is now being rolled out throughout the province.

Just some of the subject matter includes hazard identification and control, personal protection equipment, occupational health, fall protection, electrical hazards, and materials handling and hoisting and rigging. Specifically targeted to new and entry-level workers and individuals considering a career in construction, the program will highlight some of the common hazards on the job site and the measures which can be taken to prevent injury and illness, says IHSA president and CEO Enzo Garritano.

It’s an awareness-only program and does not certify participants for work in any construction setting requiring certification. Job-specific training must also be conducted by the employers, he points out.

“We have made the course as tight as possible as it is geared to all sectors of the industry, whether its roadbuilding, mechanical/electrical, residential, etc.”

In large part, that approach is predicated on the “transitory” nature of new workers who may start in one section of the industry, but then move on to another, he explains. Planning for the new course began in early 2019. The curriculum then was fine-tuned after two pilot training sessions last fall with participating construction workers, says Garritano, stressing the program is “aligned” with the use of manuals—which they got to keep—plus work-sheets and activities which kept them engaged, says Garritano.

A team of 30 IHSA staff consultants with experience in health and safety and who have worked in the construction industry will be delivering the program across the province, he says.

One of those consultants is Holly Baril who conducted the first course at the association’s Toronto headquarters in mid-January. In emphasizing the importance of the training, she took a few key clauses straight from page one of the approximtely 70-page student manual.

Between the years 2014 to 2018, 105 workers lost their lives due to a traumatic injury on a construction site in Ontario. And between the years 2013 to 2017, another 172 construction workers in Ontario died due to an occupational disease as a result of an exposure to hazards on construction projects in the province.

A resident of Sudbury, she told the attendees: “I have lived in Sudbury for 11 years and there has been a (construction) death every one of those years.”

And even with the increased emphasis on fall protection measures, falls from heights continue to be the top cause of fatalities in the Ontario construction industry, she pointed out.

The first-ever course attracted a cross-section of participants including newly hired IHSA health and safety consultants James Wylie, an electrician with 12 years’ experience, and Joe Assenza, a steel framer/drywaller.

“We’ll both be teaching the course,” said Wylie. Also in attendance was Mayank Arora, a 26-year-old worker with Con-Rep Services, whose employer instructed him to take the training, and representatives from LIUNA Local 506, including Artur Dovale, an instructor with the local.

Reaching out to various unions to determine their interest in offering it is definitely an association goal, says Garritano.

Many companies prefer to have IHSA instructors deliver training at their facilities. That will also be an option for the program which will be subject to future reviews, series of shorter tests throughout the two days.

Other positive factors cited by the attendees included the use of manuals—which they got to keep—plus work-sheets and activities which kept them engaged, says Garritano.

Although specifically geared to entry workers, the entry-level construction program or similar training might also benefit veteran workers. “After a certain period of the job complacency can set in.”
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showed that roughly one quarter of workers in Ontario, British Columbia and Atlantic Canada reported using cannabis within two hours of starting work. Twenty-five-per-cent of respondents in Atlantic Canada indicated using cannabis within two hours of work, while in Ontario and B.C. it was 24 per cent. The overall average across the country was 22 per cent. Quebec recorded a rate of 22 per cent, the figure was 18 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in Alberta it was 14 per cent. Results of 22 per cent; the figure was 18 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in Alberta it was 14 per cent. Results of 22 per cent; the figure was 18 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in Alberta it was 14 per cent. Results of the first survey showed some workers in the sample were already using cannabis in 2021.

The first survey was completed by 2,014 workers. The company’s first effort involved deploying alarm-enabled SmartCones to protect airport employees working around the perimeters of airplanes. Instead of attempting to launch a product in a new form factor, the company realized that a super-charged traffic cone would be more likely to gain acceptance and regulatory approval. “The shape of the cone is just a wrapper for the technology inside,” says Lee. “Traffic cones are already well accepted in most environments and they’re generally empty, so you can introduce new technology in an available footprint.” The cones can contain components ranging from computer processors and video cameras, to motion detectors, microphones, seismic monitors, air quality monitors, thermometers, alarms, solar power cells and wireless transmitters.

One of the company’s main construction applications is the creation of ‘no go’ zones marked by warming systems that can include audio alarms, recorded shout-outs, smartphone alerts, vibrating wristbands, or lights attached to hard hats that inform users about potential hazards. “We can mark a path as a ‘no-go’ zone so that people stay out of an area that a truck will use to drop construction materials,” says Lee. “We can mark off a pit or excavation to keep people away or we can warn pedestrians about machinery such as cranes or excavators traversing through a work zone. A device inside the cab of the vehicle can also inform the operator when workers are nearby. We can even provide the operator with a product that shows them where people are moving around the vehicle. It can be as simple or complex as you want.” SmartCone is currently working with IBM and other partners to develop data gathering solutions, including wearables, that will determine if workers in hazardous environments are in danger or at risk.

SmartCone technology allows workers to create ‘no go’ zones marked by warning systems that can include audio alarms and smartphone alerts.

The company is also working with the University of Ottawa on SmartCone Life Sciences, an initiative that will allow the device to monitor the core heat of construction workers assigned to cold climates. “The value proposition for construction companies is that they don’t have to obtain multiple devices to handle a range of safety concerns,” says Lee. “SmartCone is adaptable to almost any application by adding modules to the device. If a construction company is interested in expanding the range of SmartCone functions, they can talk to us or one of our partners to expand its capability.” Construction companies can buy the devices outright or sign on to plans like smart phones, which include a deposit and a monthly fee. SmartCone’s appearance can also be altered for specific purposes. As a security monitoring system, for example, it can be wrapped in vinyl or aluminum to protect the exhaust stack of a piece of heavy equipment. SmartCone was one of the finalists in the 2019 Hypercube Challenge, an initiative supported by the Air Force Research Laboratory’s New Mexico office to develop Internet of Things technology on the moon. The company has been provided with office space at the research centre to further develop extraterrestrial applications, beginning with SmartAsteroid, a dodecahedron designed to create a purpose-built positioning system on the moon. “It’s based on SmartCone Constellation, a product that creates a dynamic ‘no-go’ zone for construction workers who may be underground or where they may be injured by falling tools or objects,” says Lee. “Even on the moon, we’re showing our construction roots.”

SmartCone was launched in 2011 by founder and chief executive officer Jason Lee with the mission of securing assets and making the world a little safer. The company’s first effort involved deploying alarm-enabled SmartCones to protect airport employees working around the perimeters of airplanes. Instead of attempting to launch a product in a new form factor, the company realized that a super-charged traffic cone would be more likely to gain acceptance and regulatory approval. “The shape of the cone is just a wrapper for the technology inside,” says Lee. “Traffic cones are already well accepted in most environments and they’re generally empty, so you can introduce new technology in an available footprint.”