

Habitational Security

Criminal activity including rape, assault, and theft can threaten our livelihood. No longer can we assume this type of criminal activity is only happening in parking lots, remote areas or common properties. They are occurring where we live. Building owners and management should be concerned about the safety of their residents and implementing programs to ensure that safety. Installing hardware to help deter criminal activity is only half of it. The other half is educating residents and employees on security precautions.

The following is a guide to improve personal safety techniques and help building owners and residents understand how these recommendations deter the criminal element.

Good access control is a key component to deterring criminal activity. The security value of doors and windows is dependent on strength/reliability of the locking mechanism and the construction quality of the door and window. Following are hardware features that can help improve the integrity of wall/window openings.

- Solid core entry doors are preferred over hollow core.
- Reinforce door frames and hinges to prevent kicking in.
- Install deadbolts, but do not locate turning latches within 40 inches of any window glazing.
- Striker plate for locking mechanism should have screws no less than 2.5 inches long.
- Entry door of all residential units should be provided with a 180 degree wide angle viewer (peep hole) for identification purposes.

Perimeter protections are important because they act as a deterrent to any attempt of impropriety. Utilizing the following techniques may help protect and eliminate criminal attempts.

- Building exterior should have consistent illumination (minimum 5 foot candles).
- Position exterior lighting to eliminate dark areas/shadows.
- Maintain landscaping/foilage, especially near buildings openings at ground level.

Objects placed adjacent to buildings offer opportunity for criminal attempts. To deter access to upper levels, the following practices should be minimized.

- Do not locate garbage cans, dumpsters, trellises, ladders, sheds, etc., near wall or roof openings.
- Gutters/drain pipes should be designed only to support the gutters and the water it carries.
- To deter scaling, wall projections (Florida rooms, canopies) should be no less than 10 feet in height or should have limited access.

What should not happen is a fortress effect by enclosing a piece of property for the sake of security. This can often lead to other problems. Burglar bars, locked or blocked doors are excellent crime deterrents but can create a life safety concern because of improper exit access in emergency situations.

Common areas, such as parking lots, club houses, laundry rooms, remote entrances and vestibules are areas susceptible to criminal assaults. Additional safeguards may be required.

Security features that may be required include:

- Watchman/doorman
- Security patrols
- Closed circuit television
- Electronic entry systems
- Intercom system for apartment-vestibule communication
- Adequate lighting

Additional programs need to be developed by building management to address the following security components.

- Residents who are physically/mentally challenged or are non-ambulatory may have special needs that can circumvent normal security measures.
- Building management should perform periodic security surveys and have a prompt response to noted deficiencies in security, e.g., perimeter light replacement, evidence of vandalism, etc.
- Background checks of personnel should be conducted as permitted by law to assure no past criminal or deviant activity.
- Master keys should be assigned to building personnel. All spare keys should be in a secured area. Misplaced keys should be reported immediately. The fewer the keys the better.
- Advertising or lease agreements should not imply security features that do not exist.
- House addresses should be adequately displayed for easy identification by police or other emergency vehicles. Addresses should be visible from the street.

Summary

Residents should learn not to invite crime. Doors should not be left open. The use of security hardware can be reinforced by issuing newsletters and other printed materials that promote safety. It is important to educate residents on the use of these devices and make them aware of security procedures.

For more information please call us toll-free at 866-262-0540 or visit us online at www.cna.com/riskcontrol.

