



## HABITATIONAL SECURITY

Apartment and condominium buildings/complexes may present personal safety hazards. In a most recent study by American Trial Lawyers Association, 65% of all security related cases involve inadequate security. 31% of the defendants sued own apartments, condos or cooperatives. This is more than any other type of occupancy. The average settlement is greater than \$600,000, the average jury award exceeded \$1.3 million dollars.

Rape, assault, and theft are types of criminal activity that threaten our livelihood. No longer can we assume that 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 these 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. Hardware features that improve the integrity of wall/window openings are:

- 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. The following techniques when implemented may protect and help 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", enclosing a piece of property for the sake of security can often lead to other problems. Burglar bars, locked or blocked doors are excellent crime deterrents, but create a life safety concern because of improper exit access in emergency situations.

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Common areas such as parking lots, clubhouses, laundry rooms, remote entrances and vestibules are areas susceptible to criminal assaults. Additional safeguards may be required. Security features that may be required are:

- 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:

- Residents who are physically/mentally challenged or are ambulatory. These individuals 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 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. Report misplaced keys immediately. The fewer the keys the better.
- Advertising or lease agreements should not imply security features that do not exist.

- Adequately display house addresses 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.

Court jurisdictions have broadened the responsibility of the landlord/building owner concerning adequate security. Court decisions have deliberated that there is a reasonable expectation of security for a tenant. It is easier and less expensive to prevent and deter criminal activity than it is to recover and repair after an undesirable incident has happened.

## REFERENCES

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