

Crime Prevention Tips for Apartment Buildings

Simply put, some buildings are more attractive to thieves and vandals than others. Maybe they are easy to get into, easy to escape from, poorly lit, etc. When the risk of getting caught is low, the chances for crime increase.

Laundry Rooms

Laundry rooms are a frequent target because of the money in the machines. There have also been cases of women attacked in laundry rooms.

- Where is the laundry room located? Is it hidden in the basement or is it in an area that has lots of traffic? Can it be moved to an area with higher traffic? Can higher traffic be sent towards the laundry room by adding a social room or games room?
- Are there any windows allowing people to see into the laundry room? The more windows, the less likely to be broken into.
- How easy is it to get into the laundry room? Is it locked or unlocked? If it is locked, is it a good lock? Is that lock protected by a mechanism that prevents prying the door open?
- Is there a lot of money left in the machines? If the money is emptied frequently and you do get broke into, then they will be less likely to return if they don't get much.
- Is the laundry room protected by video cameras? A CCTV system that is being recorded can help deter crime. The image can also be broadcast through the building's cable system so residents can see if anyone

is in the laundry room.

Parkades

By far the largest problem is parkade break-ins. Start by looking at the exterior of your building.

- Is it clear when you leave the public sidewalk and step onto private property when people go to your building? Consider hedges, chain-link or wrought-iron fences, etc as ways to establish that this is private property. Keep hedges, bushes and trees trimmed so they do not provide hiding spots but they do make it clear that this is a well-maintained private property.
- Are there hiding spots where undesirables can congregate without fear of being seen? What steps can be taken to eliminate these hiding spots without impairing fire exits?
- Is the exterior of the building well lit? The use of white or light colored paints can also go a long way to enhancing the light levels
- Check the area around the overhead door. Are there places where bad guys can hide waiting for a vehicle to leave and then slip inside? See through fencing (chain-link or wrought-iron) can be used to take away some hiding spots.
- Mirrors can be used to look around corners. Additional lighting is also good for keeping people out of these areas.
- The building residents must be constantly reminded to not drive away until the overhead door is completely closed. An effective way to deal with this is a sign installed one car length

inside & outside the overhead door that says, "STOP, WAIT HERE until the overhead door closes!" A CCTV camera should also be installed in this area so the recording can be reviewed to monitor residents' behavior at the door. Those that refuse to Stop & Wait should be disciplined in some way: fines, removal of parking privileges, etc.

- The "broken window theory" has been tested in many cities and many different types of neighborhoods. Each time research shows that if a broken window is not repaired, then very soon all of the windows are broken. Simply put, a well maintained property is less likely to attract crime. Make sure the exterior of the property is well-maintained including landscaping, fencing, painting, etc. Inside the parkade, do not allow residents to store things in their parking stalls. It usually looks junky. All doors should be well labeled, clean & painted. Door hardware should be kept in good working order. The parkade should be swept & power-washed regularly.
- Lighting should be reviewed to ensure that the area where the vehicles are parked is emphasized over the driving lanes. This allows residents walking towards their vehicles to see if someone is lurking around the vehicles. Too many parkades have the driving lanes overlit compared to the parking stalls. Consider a coat of white paint to really enhance the lighting. If funds are tight, start by painting around the light fixtures and expanding from there.

- If every parkade operated a 24-hour taxi stand, there would be no crime in parkades. The challenge is how you get more traffic moving through the parkade for legitimate reasons. A 24-hour security guard is very effective but way too expensive for most properties. Consider sharing these types of services with neighboring buildings.
- One of the more overlooked areas is the vehicles themselves. Residents must take some responsibility themselves. They need to be reminded to secure their vehicles by using “The Club” or similar device, use car alarms and to remove valuables from their vehicles. They should have a small duffel bag to carry CD’s, stereos, change, etc. from their vehicle to their suite and back so there is nothing in the vehicle.
- One of the most common mistakes is locking the fire exits. If a door has an exit light over it (or if it is part of a designated fire exit route) then you must be able to get through that door (in an emergency) without the use of a key or special knowledge.
- In many buildings, it is permissible to lock the stairwell doors from the stairwell side so once in the stairwell, you must exit unless you have a key. Also look at the elevator lobby. If it is not part of the fire exit route, you can lock both sides of the elevator lobby to keep unwanted people out. It may also be permissible to lock a fire exit as long as it

unlocks when the fire alarm system goes off. This is often used in conjunction with a card-access system. A word of caution! Before changing, altering or locking an exit route, consult with a fire inspector.

- The locks and doors themselves are very important to keep unwanted people out. Some locks and doors are very easy to defeat. Cheap locks may not have enough “throw.” That is, the latch does not go into the door jamb very far. Other doors are easy to defeat because the door does not fit into the jamb very well. A simple plastic card can be used to defeat a door when the lock and door are sloppy. A blocker plate can often help overcome this problem. Key control is another big issue. If you have a standard Schlage or Weiser lock, then keys can be cut and circulated without your knowledge. Do you know how many keys are out there for your building? Who has them? Consider upgrading to a registered lock system where only the registered owner can order more keys. Keep track of who the keys have been issued to. If possible, collect a hefty deposit for the keys so that they are returned. Even better is an electronic card-access system where every user is issued a card and that information is tracked in the software.

Every use of the card is tracked in the software so you know exactly who opened what door and when. More importantly, if a card is lost or stolen it can easily be deleted from the system and you do not have to re-key the building. Generally, this type of system will cost about \$2,000 for each door you need to control.

- Intercom systems are another area to look at. Older intercom systems can easily be crossed up to open the door even if nobody presses the door button. The new telephone entry systems are more secure in that only one resident can be called at a time and they must answer their phone before opening the door. They also have the convenience of punching in a code to open the door. These codes should never be given out to residents as they can easily be passed around without control. It is probably best to not use them at all.
- The last area to consider is one that nobody wants to think about and that is “authorized” guests. When a guest comes to visit someone in their suite and then they leave; where do they go? It is very rare for residents in a building to walk their guests to the door but it may be a good idea if they did. As I said, it is a touchy subject and is brought up as a point to ponder..