



Risk Insights

Provided by: MST Insurance Solutions, Inc.

Understanding Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Crime poses a considerable threat to businesses of all sizes and sectors, often resulting in large-scale losses. Business owners may assume that traditional security methods are the only way to protect against criminal activity in the workplace; however, there are other impactful solutions. In particular, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) has emerged as a proactive approach to deterring criminals and reducing associated losses for many businesses.

CPTED is rooted in the idea that the design, layout and landscaping of a facility—and how people use that space—play a major role in either encouraging or discouraging crime. The primary goal is to set up the work environment in a way that limits opportunities for crime to occur and cultivates positive social interactions, thereby making employees and visitors feel safe and less fearful of potential criminal activity.

Over the years, CPTED has become increasingly prevalent, evolving into an innovative risk management tool that complements facilities' existing security measures and helps mitigate various types of crime, including theft, robbery, vandalism, parking lot incidents and, in some cases, workplace violence. By adopting this approach, businesses can reduce the likelihood of criminal activity and related liability, reputational and operational disruption exposures. This article provides more information on core CPTED principles, outlines practical ways to implement this approach and highlights additional considerations for business owners to keep in mind.

Core CPTED Principles

CPTED focuses on how people typically behave in a given environment and how the environment's different components can contribute to safe interactions that minimize the chance of crime. Specifically, this approach centers around the following principles:

- **Natural surveillance**—This principle encourages proper placement of physical property features, activities and occupants to enhance visibility. Concepts that enforce natural surveillance may include raised entryways, low-growing vegetation, ample exterior lighting and unobstructed windows facing parking lots.
- **Natural access control**—This principle fosters safe movement and restricts unauthorized access by leveraging property layouts that naturally guide occupants to appropriate pathways and discourage unwanted visitors. It primarily entails the dedicated placement of entrances, exits, lighting and landscaping.



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- **Territorial reinforcement**—This principle involves the use of physical property attributes that demonstrate ownership and aim to make potential criminals feel both unprotected and unwanted. Concepts that promote territorial reinforcement may include fencing, pavement treatments and warning signage.
- **Maintenance and management**—This principle pertains to routine property inspections, repairs and cleaning processes that help make occupants feel comfortable and safe and deter potential criminals from disrupting the current environment. Key maintenance and management practices include upholding strict housekeeping standards, regularly removing graffiti and trash, and frequently servicing critical fixtures and equipment.
- **Activity support**—This principle promotes the use of a property for legitimate and positive activities, thus making the space more inviting for the surrounding community and creating a sense of public ownership. This, in turn, can transform the property into a community asset, with many individuals becoming invested in keeping it protected from criminal activity. More eyes on the property can dissuade criminals from targeting the premises, especially those who prefer to strike when no one's looking. Concepts that can generate activity support include public seating and walking paths, community gardens, and regularly scheduled programming (e.g., fundraisers, picnics and recreational events).

Practical Steps for CPTED Implementation

Business owners can consider taking these steps when implementing CPTED within the workplace:

- **Conduct a facility audit.** First and foremost, it's best for business owners to carefully assess their properties to identify key safety and security concerns that could be improved upon through the application of CPTED principles. This audit should clearly outline existing risk management techniques and ongoing workplace exposures. From there, business owners can determine next steps and associated facility layout and landscaping modifications.
- **Embed CPTED early.** Whenever possible, business owners should strive to incorporate CPTED into the early stages of designing their properties, namely during initial site selection, new building construction and major facility renovations. This way, large-scale factors that would be difficult to modify later on—such as building orientation,

parking lot location, sidewalks, and primary entrances and exits—can be better aligned with CPTED principles. Even so, business owners occupying existing properties or rented facilities can still make impactful changes to their premises to integrate CPTED, especially as it pertains to interior design modifications (e.g., furniture, flooring and lighting) and minor landscaping projects.

- **Determine maintenance needs.** After making necessary layout and landscaping modifications to align their properties with CPTED principles, it's imperative for business owners to establish appropriate maintenance schedules to help keep their facilities in good condition going forward. Specific maintenance needs will vary between properties and their related contents and operations. In some cases, business owners may benefit from delegating such maintenance to trusted contractors.
- **Incorporate CPTED with other security layers.** When adopting CPTED, business owners should make sure that any property updates or modifications they make complement current workplace security features, such as video surveillance, alarm systems and advanced access controls that restrict entry to sensitive areas (e.g., key fobs). Ideally, CPTED and traditional security methods work in coordination to safeguard the facility against criminal activity. If any CPTED-related changes conflict with current security features on their premises (or vice versa), business owners should act accordingly to ensure that all property features can function effectively.
- **Monitor and adjust as needed.** As their specific operations, assets, and community surroundings change over time, business owners will need to revise their CPTED strategies and other workplace safety and security measures to properly mitigate their evolving crime exposures. As such, business owners should periodically revisit their facility audits and maintenance schedules to determine when changes are necessary.

Additional Considerations

It's important for business owners to recognize that, while CPTED has been associated with lower crime rates, it doesn't guarantee complete prevention. Furthermore, the overall effectiveness of CPTED may vary based on the unique characteristics of a facility, the context of application, and commitment to property maintenance and management. Additionally, CPTED typically requires ongoing effort from various parties, making it essential for all stakeholders to buy into the approach and work together to ensure successful

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implementation.

Business owners should be aware that an excessive focus on workplace security measures can ultimately undermine the original goals of CPTED. For instance, a security-heavy layout can often make a space feel unwelcoming, potentially diminishing positive social interactions and fostering a negative workplace culture. With this in mind, it's crucial for business owners to find an appropriate balance between traditional security methods, CPTED principles and other design strategies to cultivate spaces that feel both safe and inviting for occupants.

Conclusion

No business is immune to criminal activity, making it vital to have sound risk management practices in place. Through the thoughtful implementation of CPTED principles and coordination with existing security and design features, business owners can better defend their properties against crime and promote a safer workplace.

Contact us today for additional risk management tips.