

Why Choose Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) For Your Next Building Project?

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Many years ago in the USA, law enforcement professionals had a dilemma on their hands. Large public housing developments, which some had termed “The Projects”, were gaining a terrible reputation for being virtual hotbeds of crime. Breaking-and-entering, drug dealing, assaults, arson, and other serious crimes threatened the future of public housing.

During the course of investigating the root causes of these crimes, it was discovered that some serious building design flaws were hampering good policing of these areas and creating opportunity for crime. These flaws were simply architectural features that may have been aesthetically pleasing, but inadvertently provided “entrapment zones” that criminals could use to their advantage.

From this bit of history, security design professionals have found that a series of architectural enhancements can maintain the integrity of aesthetically pleasing design, while enhancing security one hundred-fold!

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) may have its roots in public housing, but its principles extend far beyond these roots into the field of urban planning as a whole, as well as security design for commercial and manufacturing spaces.

A CPTED professional will review architectural plans for new construction projects, or properties undergoing renovations. Involving the CPTED designer as early as possible in the schematic phases of design will result in a greater degree of flexibility and security enhancement potential.

This CPTED design professional will work with the plans to instill a greater degree of:

1. Natural Access Control
2. Natural Surveillance
3. Territorial Reinforcement

During this process, the CPTED professional examines what people (employees, visitors, etc.), vehicles, and neighborhoods interact with the planned space. Additionally, the goal is to increase “natural security” and decrease the reliance on costly “electronic security”.

A proper CPTED design will allow legitimate users of the space to comfortable and secure. Illegitimate users (the criminal element) will feel vulnerable and uncomfortable with the removal of entrapment zones and the associated increase in natural surveillance.

Too often, security is “dysfunctional” in that someone has simply sold a bill of goods to the owner during the construction process. This may include expensive state-of-the-art CCTV cameras, hardening materials, or other wares that the supplier sells. As the seller is concerned with moving goods and creating sales volume, the client’s actual need and suitability for on-site application of the device becomes a secondary factor. The transaction is void of a “client advocate”, as the construction team most often lacks security expertise and may rely on goods sold to them on another project.

Security should be more holistic in nature, and a balance should be struck among security design, equipment, and interactive human factors. This is where a qualified CPTED professional adds value to the project team, interacting with the architect and the other team members, and together with them formulating options for consideration by the owner. If the CPTED designer is not a salesman for specific equipment, then he can act as a client advocate in this process.

While CPTED principles work extremely well with newly-constructed environments, existing spaces can also benefit from a CPTED design review, in the form of reduced criminal activity, decreased vulnerability, and enhanced feeling of security on the part of staff and visitors.

A good example of CPTED design can be found in the modern major convenience store chains. In the past, clerks were placed in a small corner, generally behind a brick wall to maximize floor space for sellable goods. The clerk could not be seen by a passing police officer on patrol, and sale signage further hampered natural surveillance. To make matters worse, there was often clutter and confusion in front of these stores in the evening hours, due partly to the fact that public telephones – which encouraged loitering -- were often installed there. Armed robberies were common, and police had difficulty detecting a robbery in progress, despite increased patrols and undercover surveillance.

Many of these stores also suffered from poor interior and exterior lighting. Many were built during the US energy crisis, when conservation was a priority. Poor lighting selection and placement created entrapment zones in which criminals could hide undetected during evening hours.

Security design professionals decided that CPTED principles were needed to enhance security and decrease the risk of criminal activities on the properties.

They removed or repositioned the sales signage, increased both interior and exterior lighting, and positioned the cashier in the center of the store on a raised platform, easily visible from the street. Public telephones were removed from the building skirting and placed out at the end of the curb, where most store billboards were also re-located. Automatic cash drop technology was installed, removing large quantities of cash from the cashier's control. Entrapment zones were eliminated, leaving potential criminals vulnerable and exposed.

The results were immediate and dramatic: armed robbers began passing over the renovated, modern convenience stores in favor of independently owned shops which were slower to change their old-fashioned lay-outs.

Today, when even the choice of landscaping can be of crucial importance to the overall success of a facility's security design, a knowledgeable CPTED-qualified professional should be considered an invaluable part of the design team from its very inception. The result will be the maintenance of a user-friendly, attractive environment, without sacrificing those all-important features that insure the security of facilities, assets, and personnel.