

Safe Community Planning & Design: An Introduction to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Crime impacts the way most of us live our lives—whether in ways real or perceived. It can be managed but also can bleed the social, economic and physical life out of neighborhoods. Criminal activities are ever-changing and require responses that minimize the opportunities for their occurrence. Some argue that today's environment of "doing more with less" reduce the possibilities for effective crime prevention. However, creative thinking, long-term commitments (not necessarily in monetary terms), multi-disciplinary/inter-agency partnerships, and community involvement can go a long way in enhancing the safety of places.

Throughout the country, public agencies and private organizations are initiating efforts—both in partnership and individually—to reduce crime. These efforts range from enacting new laws and building new jails to forming neighborhood watch programs and initiating community-oriented policing programs to integrating crime prevention design standards in new development and providing education to homeowners and property managers. This **CENTERVIEWS** provides the reader with an introduction to one successful crime prevention planning technique, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

WHAT IS CPTED?

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or CPTED (pronounced "sep-ted") is a crime prevention planning tool that focuses on the proper design and use of the built environment. CPTED is quickly becoming a measure for proactive crime prevention planning—one that can help reduce the incidence and fear of crime, and improve overall quality of life. By no means is CPTED a panacea in efforts to rid crime from communities. However, it is one strategy among many others that can be fully employed in all types of existing and proposed development.

FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES

NATURAL SURVEILLANCE

The organization of physical features, activities and people in such a way as to maximize visibility.

A space can be designed so that users feel that they will be seen or observed if they do something illegitimate. The orientation of a building, the placement of windows, doors, and common areas, the alignment of sidewalks and paths, the locations and levels of lighting, and the proper design and size of open spaces can contribute to natural surveillance opportunities.



Excessive window clutter is a barrier to seeing outside activity; passersby are unable to see what is occurring inside—criminals like this.



An open storefront keeps "eyes on the street."

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This principle is based on the premise that criminal activity is generally reduced when an area is being observed informally by others who are present or nearby. In the pictures above, for example, a store may be less likely to be robbed if its storefront windows are free from advertisements (which obstruct vision into and out of the store) and the outdoor lighting level is increased.

NATURAL ACCESS CONTROL

The physical guidance of people coming to and going from a space by the judicious placement of entrances, exits, signs, fencing, landscaping and lighting.

Pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular circulation systems—streets, parking areas, sidewalks and trails—also play a key role in natural access control. Would-be offenders should have not only a difficult time entering a space without being observed, but also should be provided with no opportunities to justify or rationalize their presence in private or semi-private spaces (e.g. “I didn’t know this was private property:”). A space can be designed so that illegitimate users are not afforded any reasonable chance to explain why they trespassed or why they are undertaking an undesirable activity.

All too often, this principle is interpreted as building walls, installing gates, and installing electronic entrance hardware. At face value, this is not a valid interpretation.



Access in high activity areas can be controlled through traffic circles, signage, bollards and striping.

TERRITORIAL REINFORCEMENT

The use of physical attributes that express ownership, such as fences, pavement treatments, art, signage and landscaping.

People are innately territorial; it is important to delineate or differentiate one’s property from another’s. This trait transcends anything that can be owned or can have a sense of ownership attached to it.



The walls and fences in front of the residences above, provide an extreme example of territoriality.



A fenced-in front yard makes an effective statement of territoriality, and well-groomed landscaping communicates a sense of ownership.

CPTED stresses the importance of clearly designing a hierarchy of spaces: public (i.e. intended for all to use), semi-private (i.e. intended for specific users or uses), private (i.e. intended for private use by businesses, tenants and homeowners).

Is it essential, therefore, to minimize spaces that are unassigned—those that have nonexistent or unclear signs of ownership. Planning for and developing spaces with territorial reinforcement in mind can heighten the conspicuousness of illegitimate users.

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

The continued use of a space for its intended purpose, which serves as an additional expression of ownership and territoriality.

Although the physical dimensions of CPTED are important, no effort is sustained unless it is properly maintained and operated. Regular landscape maintenance, well-trained rental property management and prompt repair of lighting sources are examples of this principle. Whether a single-family residence, an apartment complex, a school campus or a downtown's Main Street, a space must be maintained for its designated purpose or it can get caught in the cycle of deterioration and become victim to undesirable activities and conditions.



Landscaping maintenance is ideal as sight lines between the pathway and residences are not obstructed.

THREE BENEFITS

Cities across the country and throughout the world are making CPTED a household name in planning, development, and policing circles. For example, Phoenix, Dallas, Ann Arbor, Toronto, Sarasota, Seattle, St. Paul, Tempe, Louisville, Mesa, New Orleans, and New York are among the hundreds of cities employing CPTED strategies. Businesses, too, have been active in the use of CPTED. Convenience stores and gas stations, in particular, have led the private sector's implementation of CPTED strategies; better lighting, uncluttered storefronts, signage, and other features have significantly reduced the occurrence of crime on the properties of these businesses. The building industry has been integrating CPTED principles into new developments as well. And, property managers are subscribing to CPTED to improve safety and reduce liability. Following are selected benefits realized from employing CPTED.

PARTNERSHIP

Traditional crime prevention tools have involved a limited number of disciplines. In recent years, however, the pendulum has moved toward the employment of inter-disciplinary strategies to combat the conditions that contribute to crime. Not only are individuals with various professional abilities participating in crime prevention activities, but an array of interests, such as business groups, neighborhood associations, social service agencies and others are also involved. The nature of CPTED leads to successful crime prevention efforts through partnership, cohesiveness, and information-sharing. In sum, CPTED encourages collective action to commonly held concerns.

PROTECTION AGAINST LIABILITY

Less than a year ago (April 1996), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) published a **Research in Brief** entitled, *The Expanding Role of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design in Premises Liability* (Publication No. NIJ 157309) which responds to the increasing trend of crime victims seeking damages from the owners and managers of the property upon which the crimes occurred.

In hearings on premises liability, courts are scrutinizing property owners and managers to determine if reasonable efforts were made to make the subject property safe and secure. Expert witnesses in these cases testify that criminals assess a property's attributes when deciding to undertake an illegitimate activity; although a variety of factors contribute to criminal activity, the location, design, use, and other characteristics of a site result in "curb appeal" that will attract criminals.

CPTED concepts are being used by both defendants—to demonstrate the "reasonableness" of the steps taken to secure the property—and plaintiffs—to argue that the subject property did not integrate reasonable safety measures, including CPTED strategies. According to the NIJ publication, "With the development of CPTED, architects, developers, and property owners have an important tool for proactive crime prevention."

ADAPTABILITY

The CPTED methods used to identify and correct the conditions that contribute to criminal activity can be applied to settings as diverse as an inner-city industrial area to a suburban master planned community. CPTED can respond to a wide array of socioeconomic characteristics that may be presented in a crime prevention planning effort. Based on the nature and extend of conditions present in an area, implementing CPTED strategies may include immediate and longer-term actions.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Since crime is often the number one public concern, it is important to seek approaches that can help eliminate the conditions that contribute to crime. Throughout the country, the public and private sectors are recognizing that police departments cannot successfully deal alone with the twin issues of responding to crime and correcting the conditions that contribute to crime. A wide range of city departments, businesses, neighborhood associations, and other groups are joining the efforts to address crime, by forming partnerships, coordinating resources, and providing outreach.

One of the tools central to these efforts in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or CPTED. With the increase in participation and coordination, and the application of CPTED principles, the fight against crime is developing into a proactive—rather than reactive—process which leads to neighborhood reinvigoration, infill development, and improved community image.

CPTED RESOURCES

A wealth of information exists about CPTED. Resources on the topic can be obtained from the following:

International Society of Crime Prevention Practitioners: 1-412-655-1600

National Crime Prevention Institute: 1-505-588-6987

National Crime Prevention Council: 1-202-466-6272

National Institute of Justice: 1-800-851-3420

Bureau of Justice Assistance: 1-800-688-4252

American Institute of Architects Research Division: 1-202-879-7750

American Association of Retired Persons Criminal Justice Services: 1-202-434-2222

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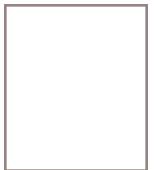
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