

Understanding Human Behavior Leads to Safer Environments

Contributed by the National Crime Prevention Institute

Excerpted and adapted from *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* Revised February 2007

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SUMMARY

The National Crime Prevention Institute explores the relationship between human behavior and the physical environment and offers nine environmental design strategies that can potentially deter crime.

ENVIRONMENT AND BEHAVIOR

"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

—Winston Churchill

This quote could be extended from buildings to all elements of the built environment. It elegantly captures something that many of us understand intuitively but do not always recognize: that the physical environment affects the way people behave.

The professional literature on the relationship between environmental design and human behavior spans a broad range of related topics, including building security, crime prevention, defensible space, ergonomic design, lighting design, livable communities, street and roadway design, retail marketing, and workplace productivity.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN, CRIME, AND SECURITY

Since 1971, the National Crime Prevention Institute (NCPI) has served as the nation's educational and technical resource on crime prevention, including the relationship between the design of the physical environment and crime. This relationship is covered in *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*, which enumerates nine major crime prevention through environmental design strategies, excerpted and adapted below:

Provide clear border definition of controlled space.

It is a common-law requirement that space must be defined to preserve property rights. Boundaries may be identified physically or symbolically. Fences, shrubbery, or signs are acceptable forms of border definition. The underlying principle is that a "reasonable individual" must be able to recognize the transition from public to private space. The

arrangements of furniture and color definition are means of identifying interior spaces. Plaques and pictures on walls in hallways help to define ownership and are powerful environmental cues that affect the behavior and predispositions of owners, normal users, and abnormal users alike.

Provide clearly marked transitional zones.

Provide transitional zones to clearly mark the movement from public to semipublic to semiprivate to private space. As transitional definition increases, the range of excuses for improper behavior is reduced. The user must be made to acknowledge movement into controlled space.

Relocate gathering areas.

Formally designate gathering or congregating areas in locations with good natural surveillance and access control. Gathering areas on campuses may be placed in positions that are out of the view of undesired users to decrease the magnetic effect or attraction.

Place safe activities in unsafe locations.

Within reason, this strategy may be used to overcome problems on school campuses or in parks, offices, or institutional settings. Safe activities serve as magnets for normal users who exhibit behavior that tells other normal users that they are safe, and that tell abnormal users that they are at greater risk of scrutiny or intervention. Some caution must be used to ensure that a safe activity is not being placed in a location that normal users cannot defend.

Place unsafe activity in safe locations.

Placing vulnerable activities near windows of adjacent, occupied space or within tightly controlled areas may help overcome risk and make users of these areas feel safer.

Redesignate the use of space to provide natural barriers.

Separate conflicting activities by distance, by natural terrain, or by other functions to avoid fear-producing conflict. For instance, the sounds emanating from a

basketball court may be disruptive and fear-producing for a senior citizen or for a toddler in a nearby play area. The threat does not have to be real to create the perception of risk for the normal or desired user.

Improve scheduling of space.

Effective and productive use of spaces reduces the risk and the perception of risk for normal users. Conversely, abnormal users feel at greater risk of surveillance and intervention in their activities. In commercial settings, well-planned spatial relationships and scheduling may improve profit and productivity, while increasing the control of behavior.

Redesign space to increase the perception of natural surveillance.

The perception of surveillance is more powerful than the reality. Hidden surveillance cameras do little to make normal users feel safer. Conversely, abnormal users do not feel at greater risk of detection when they are unaware of surveillance. Windows, clear lines of sight, and other "natural" surveillance techniques are often as effective as costly mechanical security devices or guards.

Overcome distance and isolation.

Improved communications and design efficiencies can increase the perception of natural surveillance and control. Locating unsupervised spaces such as restrooms near supervised or heavily used areas can increase convenience, increase the perception of safety, and lower maintenance costs related to vandalism. Portal radios can improve staff productivity as well as enhance the perception of immediate access to help.

ABOUT NCPI

The National Crime Prevention Institute is a division of the School of Justice Administration, College of Urban and Public Affairs, at the University of Louisville. NCPI is a national educational and technical resource for the development of comprehensive crime prevention programs at the local, state, and national levels. NCPI offers training programs on *Crime and Loss Prevention Practice*, *Physical Security*, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*, *Private Security Management*, and *Law Enforcement Gerontology*. For more information, visit the NCPI Web site, www.louisville.edu/a-s/ja/ncpi.

The AIA gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the National Crime Prevention Institute for making this valuable information available to AIA members.

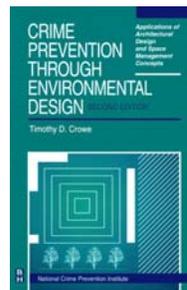
RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 11.10.02 Specifying Building Products for Building Security
- 11.10.03 Building Security from a Client Point of View
- 11.10.04 Building Security: Basic Design Elements

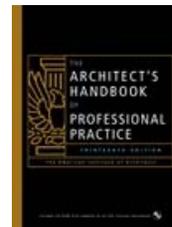
For More Information on This Topic



Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, by Timothy D. Crowe, can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.

See also "Security Evaluation and Planning" by

Marco A. Monsalve and James R. Sutton, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice Update 2003*, page 109.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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Key Terms

- Building performance
- Use design
- Security