

Multiresidential (Apartment & Condos) Security Guidelines

The reduction of crimes committed against persons who live in apartments and condominiums (multiresidential housing) should be a priority for any law enforcement agency responsible for their protection. There are some criminals who prey specifically upon apartments and condominiums. They know, for example, that many female and senior citizen owners and tenants live alone.

Most persons who are arrested for crimes against property are male and between 18-21 years old. They frequently live nearby their target areas and are familiar with the neighborhood. When involved in burglary or theft, they often work the property on foot, unless they need a vehicle to transport stolen merchandise. The property criminal may have lived in the multiresidential community or have a friend who is a current resident.

Most property criminals are moderately or poorly motivated. If they perceive a target multiresidential community to be well protected, they may either be deterred or move on to what they think is an easier target. There are four points to remember concerning the *motivation of property criminals*:

1. The property criminal's motivations to commit a theft is at its lowest level during the first visit to the property;
2. Criminal motivation increases with familiarity of the property.
3. Success in committing crimes on a multiresidential property, will increase the level of motivation to commit more crimes; and
4. It is much more difficult to deter a criminal who has successfully committed crimes on a multiresidential property.

Lines of Defense

There are basically four lines of defense that should be considered in a comprehensive multi-residential security program. These lines of defense are overlapping and complimentary. To be successful in deterring crime, they are dependent upon cooperation and support between the property owners or tenants, the apartment or condominium management and the local law enforcement agency.

- **First Line of Defense**

The first line of defense is represented by the perimeter around the multi-residential complex. If the perimeter is well marked and secured, it sends a clear signal of security

awareness to the would-be criminal.

- ✓ Ideally, a multi-residential complex should be completely surrounded by a fence at least 6' in height. This is to discourage unwanted access to the property and to make it difficult to make off with stolen property or merchandise.
- ✓ The perimeter of the property should have as few entrances as possible. Ideally, there should be only one way in and out of the property. Because they want an escape route, psychologically thieves do not like to prey upon property or areas where there is only one way in and out.
- ✓ The transition onto the property should be clearly marked and well lighted. There should be no doubt where the perimeter or boundary to the property is.
- ✓ Some multi-residential complexes may have a gate guard who checks the identity of those persons entering the property.
- ✓ There are a number of possible security-related signs that can be posted at the entrance to a multi-residential complex for the purpose of deterring possible criminal activity:
 - If an apartment complex participates in a certified Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, they can place signs that indicate they have joined this program.
 - A sign indicating the multi-residential complex participates in a Neighborhood Watch Program.
 - Possibly a sign indicating the complex is patrolled by armed officers or guards or that there are CCTV surveillance cameras located throughout the complex.

- **The Second Line of Defense**

The second line of defense can be referred to as the common areas throughout the multi-residential complex. This includes roadways, walkways, parking lots or areas, recreational areas such as playgrounds, swimming pools or tennis courts, laundry rooms, lobbies and elevators.

- ✓ **Exterior Lighting**

Common sense tells us that lighting is a deterrent to criminal activity and that multi-residential complexes are no exception.

- There should be a verifiable system of reporting lighting malfunctions. This reporting system should provide for formal periodic inspections (weekly, if possible) as well as a method of reporting lighting malfunctions as they are discovered.

- At least once a year, during a time when vegetation is at its greatest growth, a comprehensive inspection of the grounds of the complex should be conducted to identify areas where exterior lighting improvements are needed.
- A system of lighting fixture identification should be developed. The identification system should enable anyone to easily report a malfunctioning fixture to the maintenance staff.
- Exterior security lighting should be controlled by automatic devices (preferably by photocell).
- The following standard regarding illumination levels in the exterior areas of multi-residential housing complexes is recommended:
 - For parking lots, 3 - 5 footcandles of illumination.
 - For walking surfaces, 3 footcandles of illumination.
 - For building entryways, 5 footcandles of illumination.
- Motion detection lighting is recommended for areas of the complex that should not normally have pedestrian traffic or activity. This lighting accomplishes two objectives: first, the sudden presence of the light startles the unwanted intruder, leaving him exposed to the view of building occupants; and it alerts the occupant of some unusual or unwarranted activity.
- Any exterior electrical boxes should be locked.

✓ **Safe Landscapes**

Bushes, trees and shrubbery can conceal an intruder as he attempts entry into a window or door; or worse as he waits to attack or rob someone. Residents and management should evaluate the buildings and grounds and look for possible concealment opportunities. Particular attention should be given to parking areas, walkways or pathways, recreation areas and building entrances and windows. The following are recommendations related to safe landscapes in multiresidential housing complexes:

- For pathways or walkways, there should be clear views (unimpeded by landscape elements) above ground along the path.
- Plant materials (bushes and shrubbery) should not exceed two feet in height unless such materials are reasonably transparent. Trees should be trimmed so that their lowest hanging branches are no less than six feet from the ground surface.

- Trees should be trimmed if they provide access to buildings by climbing or interfere with exterior lighting.
- Bushes and shrubbery near buildings should be trimmed below first floor window height. Bushes and shrubbery should be trimmed away from buildings so as to create a “clear zone.” Rock or gravel should be installed as ground cover in this “clear zone.”

✓ **Addressing**

Multi-residential housing complexes can be confusing for authorized guests and visitors, delivery, maintenance or service personnel and providers of emergency services (police, fire, EMS). The following recommendations will help eliminate or reduce this possible confusion (and delay in emergency response).

- The street address, apartment or unit number and building number should be mounted in a permanent, stationary and durable manner that is unobstructed at all times by vines, screens or anything else that would tend to hide or obscure the numbers. The height of the letters/numbers should be of such a size to be readily discernible.
- The color of the numbers should be of a contrasting color to the background to which they are attached.
- Each principle building should display the number or letter assigned to it at or near each end of the building elevation.

✓ **Laundry Rooms**

Laundry rooms in apartment or condominium complexes can represent special security problems. The following crime prevention recommendations relate to these facilities:

- Ideally, the entrance into laundry rooms should be from the exterior of the building and clearly visible.
- Laundry room door locks should require a tenant or owner key.
- The laundry room door should have a window in it.
- A duress alarm and/or telephone should be available in the laundry room.
- Interior lighting should be wired to remain on permanently during hours of operation.
- Residents should be encouraged *not* to use the laundry facilities alone or during late night hours.

✓ **Exercise Or Workout Rooms**

The same crime prevention or security recommendations applicable to laundry rooms are also applicable to common exercise or workout rooms.

✓ **Elevators And Lobbies**

- Interior lighting in lobbies and corridors should not be on an accessible switch but should instead be controlled by a timer or photocell.
- Elevators and lobbies should be well lit, day and night.
- Possible hiding places under stairwells should be eliminated.
- Mirrors should be placed in elevators so that a user can see if anyone suspicious is already in the elevator.
- Elevators should be equipped with both a telephone and alarm or duress buttons connected to the resident manager's unit and an outside central monitoring station.
- Lobbies should have glass doors, glass in exterior doors and/or side lights.

✓ **Storage Areas**

Multi-residential housing complexes sometimes have common storage rooms or areas. The following recommendations relate to these storage areas:

- Residents should be encouraged not to go into these storage areas alone or during late night hours.
- Doors into the storage room should require a tenant or owner key.
- The storage room door should have a window in it.
- Storage room bins or cages should be constructed as sturdily as possible. A good quality padlock should be used with a well-secured hasp.
- Tenants and owners should be encouraged not to store items of significant value in such storage areas.

• **The Third Line Of Defense**

The third line of defense represents those measures management takes and on a joint basis adopts to make the multi-residential complex safe and secure.

✓ **Key Control**

Particularly for rented apartments, key control by apartment management is an important issue. Large jury awards have been made to victims of crimes in apartments because of negligent key control and use of a master key.

A resident gives up some rights when they move into a multi-residential property. In most cases, the resident, per written agreement, cannot add or replace the lock on their door unless management is given an extra key. By doing this, the management assumes the responsibility of and legal liability for key control.

Key control requires restriction and documentation of those who use back-up and master keys. The following measures help provide for effective key control by multi-residential complex management:

- Always re-key or replace any door lock at turnover of a unit.
- Eliminate or limit the use of a master key.
- Keep back-up keys in a locked keybox.
- Code keys so they do not reflect or identify a unit number.
- Secure the code sheet and keybox key separately.
- Always maintain a log of whoever checks out a back-up key.
- If there is a key cutting machine, be sure it and key blanks are secured.
- Always lock the room that houses the keybox when not occupied.

✓ **Employees**

Multi-residential complexes will usually have office, grounds and maintenance employees. Care should be taken in the employment and supervision of these employees because they have special access to units and often the trust of residents.

- Regular employees of the complex should be required to wear or display a picture type identification card while on duty.
- Non-office staff should wear a distinctive uniform.
- Contract maintenance or grounds personnel should be issued a temporary identification while on the premises. Temporary workers should surrender some valid identification to be held in the complex management office until the temporary ID is returned.

- **Fourth Line Of Defense**

The fourth and final line of defense is represented by the multiresidential building or unit itself. This line of defense represents physical and electronic security measures and procedures adopted by the occupant.

- ✓ **Utility Entry**

- **Electric Power Entrance**

- Exterior electric panels often contain disconnect switches which can totally shut off power to the building. Electrical panels should be equipped with a disconnect switch lock or other provision that makes it difficult to extinguish power. The resident should be encouraged to install a number of wall mounted rechargeable hand-held flashlight units with base chargers at various locations in the apartment or condominium, including all bedrooms and primary living areas, and make sure they are tested regularly.

- **Telephone Entrance**

- Accessible lines permit telephone service, and thus the resident's ability to call for help, can be severed by simple wire cutters. Where possible, these lines should enter the building high so as to be less susceptible to tampering. If the telephone line must remain accessible, some protection may be afforded by installing the line in rigid conduit and termination points in lockable containers. The best protection, however, is a cellular telephone that can be used should the telephone lines be taken out of service.

- ✓ **Entry Doors**

- **Door And Frame**

- Doors are the burglars first choice of entry. If a door is not unlocked, a burglar may simply kick in or pry open the door or break a side light and reach around to unlock a door. Most hollow core doors can be easily broken through. Entry doors of solid core (wood, not composite materials) or steel, 2 3/4" thick are

recommended.

If an entry door is equipped with glass within arm's length (about 40") of the door lock, break resistant polycarbonate glazing material (similar to plexiglass) attached to the inside of the door around the sides will provide considerable delay.

Key operated double cylinder deadbolts can present a potential fire escape hazard. If such a lock is used, all members of the family must be thoroughly familiar with its use and a key maintained inside near the door.

Door frames should be solidly anchored to the rough opening. There are often spaces left between the rough opening stud at a point midway up the door jamb. These spaces create a poor anchorage for hardware making the door easy to kick open. If possible, the door molding should be removed and these spaces should be filled or "shimmed" prior to mounting any new lock strikes. If the entry door opens inward, the stop strip should actually be part of the wood frame, not applied. The stop strip is a wood strip installed on or milled into the door jamb (it's the part of the jamb that the door closes on). If the stop has been nailed on the jamb, pry it off slightly and coat the surfaces with epoxy cement. Then hammer the stop back in place and further secure it with tapered wood screws installed directly in front of the lock bolts. This will make it difficult for a burglar to pry up the strip and manipulate the lock from the exterior.

– **Locks**

A key-in-knob lock by itself makes entry into a residence a simple matter. All entry doors (and possibly some interior doors) should be equipped with some form of deadbolt lock. When purchasing a lock, there are three primary things to look for: 1) a deadbolt with at least a 1" projection — the bolt should extend at least 1" from the front edge of the door; 2) a heavy tapered steel guard ring protecting an outside key cylinder that spins freely around the cylinder — this protects the outside key cylinder from being twisted off with a pair of pliers or other tools; 3) at least two case hardened steel bolts that secure the front of the lock to the back plate, through threaded holes actually in the cylinder.

Another type of lock — a rim deadbolt — that can be mounted to the inside surface of an entry door can also be used. Such locks will perform well under a forced entry attack, if they are properly selected. Some rim lock deadbolts actually interlock with the strike (a strike is the part of the lock installed on the door frame). This, in effect, physically interlocks the door to the frame thereby providing a substantial forced entry resistance, *if* the lock is mounted by carriage bolts (the kind of bolt with a smooth rounded head) and the strike is securely anchored with 3" or greater length screws that penetrate well into the framing stud. Also, make sure the outside cylinder of this lock is protected by a guard ring that makes it difficult to grasp and twist from the mounted position.

Whichever lock is chosen, remember that the two parts of the door most likely to give way under attack are the strike and the door. They simply split apart allowing the bolt to slip past the strike. To help deal with this problem, a wrap around door reinforcer is recommended for the lock — particularly auxiliary deadbolts — and a high security reinforced strike plate should be used instead of the strike that normally comes with the lock (although a number of manufacturers are now including such strikes with their locks). If a high security strike is not used, at least secure the existing strike with 3" (or longer) length screws that will penetrate well into the framing stud.

✓ **Keys**

Improper attention to the issue of keys can lead to a burglary. The following are suggestions to better insure keys are properly controlled:

- 1) When a new tenant or owner moves into an apartment or condominium, all exterior doors should be rekeyed;
- 2) Tenants and owners should keep their keys secured at all times. They should take their keys with them when they leave the apartment or condominium and keep them in their pocket or purse;
- 3) Keys should never be loaned, particularly where strangers are involved. Apartment or condominium keys should be placed on a dual key ring that will permit easy separation from the car key. When keys are surrendered in connection with service or valet parking, only the car keys should be left.
- 4) Keys and key rings should not be marked or identified in such a way so they can be traced to the owner. Some vehicle manufacturers and vehicle credit companies offer a lost key service that utilizes a serialized key tag. When installed on the key ring, postage cost to the service is guaranteed and upon receipt of the lost keys, the service notifies the owner of the recovery.
- 5) Finally, lost or stolen keys should be reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency immediately. The affected exterior door locks should be rekeyed as soon as possible — particularly if the keys were stolen.

✓ **Hinges**

If an exterior door swings outward, the knuckles of the hinges must be exposed and it may be possible to remove the hinge pins to gain entry. There is a simple way to correct this problem. First, remove the two opposing screws (door and frame side) from the top and bottom hinges. Then insert an 8 or 10 penny finishing nail in the screw hole on the frame side, but do not hammer the nail in all the way; instead leave the head of the nail exposed ¼" to ½" above the surface of the hinge. Close the door slowly and insure the exposed nail meets and extends into the screw hold on the opposite hinge.

– **Door Viewer**

Wide angle door viewers are recommended for exterior doors. Such viewers permit the resident to preview someone at the door prior to opening it.

✓ **Barricade Devices**

There are a number of commercially manufactured barricade devices that are useful in multiresidential housing. One type wedges under the door threshold. Another is wedged under the door knob. There is also an effective device that requires some minor installation — namely, a hole drilled into the floor into which the device is lowered in place behind the door.

✓ **Sliding Glass Doors**

Sliding glass doors are easy for a burglar to enter if no remedial action is taken. Often, the door panels can simply be lifted out of the tracks. To solve this problem, open the active door and install a few screws in the track, allowing the screw to project down 3/8" to 1/2". Use a stack of several metal washers to serve as a spacer so the screws can be firmly set. Slide the door closed, making sure the extended screws pass freely over the top rail of the door. Now try to lift the door from the track; upward movement should be stopped by the screws before the door can clear the bottom track. Add more washers if needed to extend the screw heads downward.

Once the door has been secured from lifting, some sort of auxiliary lock should be provided because more than likely, the standard lock supplied with the door is nothing more than a small hook bolt that can easily be forced open. Locking bars (commonly called the “Charlie Bar”) are ideal for this purpose; but a length of dowel — an old broom or mop handle, for example — can also be placed in the bottom track to keep the door from being pushed open. The dowel should be cut to a length so it fits snugly in the track between the wall and the door frame. If ventilation is needed, another dowel could be cut a few inches shorter to permit the sliding door to be opened no greater than six inches.

✓ **Garage Doors**

For apartments and condominiums with garages, the garage doors are important because not only do they permit access to the contents of the garage, but they may also provide a concealed place for an intruder to work while forcing entry. The following are a series of recommendations related to garage door security:

- The garage door should be locked at all times (even when the occupant is at home);
- A good case hardened padlock on which both ends of the shackle engage, should be used to secure the garage door;

- For garage doors with overhead tracking, drill holes into the track above a roller with a pin or padlock inserted through the slot;
- For garage doors that are counter-balanced, secure with two case-hardened hasps and padlocks bolted onto both sides of the door;
- For garage doors that have a double out swing, mount heavy duty slide bolts to the inside of one door at the top and bottom to make it stationary. A case hardened hasp and padlock can then be bolted on to secure the active door to the inactive door;
- The door leading from the garage into an apartment or condo should be a solid wood or metal core door and should have a good quality deadbolt lock on it;
- If a garage door has a “doggie door,” this can be a means of access for a burglar;
- Do not leave garage door openers in vehicles parked outside, as they can obviously be used for easy access into the garage.

✓ **Windows**

– **Double Hung Windows**

Double hung windows are by far the most common type. These units consist of two sashes that slide vertically. Factory supplied locks used on such windows are easily pried, and for this reason installation of pinning devices are recommended. Not so much as to stop a forced entry, but to force an intruder to break the glass thereby creating a considerable noise in the process.

To install an inexpensive pinning device in a double hung window, drill a 3/16" hole from the inside window sash halfway through the outside sash at a slight downward angle. Then insert a nail or pin into the hole to secure the window. If the sash is wood, the pin can be made of such length as to set flush with the sash. A magnet kept nearby can then be used to remove the pin. The occupant must remember, however, that room windows are often used as a means of escape from burning buildings and at least one window in each room should be available for such purposes (i.e. the pin should be *removable* without a magnet or tool).

– **Horizontal Sliding Glass Windows**

Sliding glass windows are often fabricated from inexpensive and lightweight materials. Locks used to provide security are similar in quality to the window. Like sliding glass doors, sliding glass window sashes can often be lifted from

their track, particularly if left in the unlocked state as would occur if a “vent” lock is used (a vent lock is a special device that allows the window to be kept open slightly for ventilation purposes).

Horizontal sliding windows should be treated much the same as sliding glass doors. Header stops in the form of screws with metal washer stacks can be used to remove the space between the top rail of the sash and the track in a way that prevents the sash from being lifted from the track. Once this has been accomplished, a length of wood dowel or special blocking lock bar can be installed on the window to prevent the window from sliding.

In some cases, both window sashes slide independently. The outer most sash should be fixed in the track by screws and/or brackets. Once this is accomplished, the actions previously recommended can be implemented.

– **Casement, Hopper or Awning Windows**

These window styles generally hinge or pivot at one point and the locks used on such windows may have lever handles that actually pull the windows tightly closed. They may also have cranks located on the frame which, when rotated, extends the windows to the open position (assuming the handle has been unlocked).

In most cases, the locks used with these styles are reasonably secure. To improve the security of these windows, loosen the set screw in the crank handle and remove the crank handle altogether. The evacuation issue, however, must be addressed.

– **Security Bars or Grills**

Covering the inside or outside of windows with security bars or grills is a good way to discourage burglars, however, if not installed correctly such security precautions could trap the occupant inside the apartment or condominium during a fire emergency. In addition, placing security bars or grills on windows of rented apartments may not be permitted under the occupant’s contract.

If security bars or grills are installed — either by the occupant or the property manager — there should be at least one window in each room that can be released or removed from the inside without a key or special tool. Family members and guests should be made aware how the windows can be opened.

– **Below Grade Windows**

Windows that are below grade can be difficult to secure and particularly vulnerable to intrusion. One or two single steel bars or straps over the windows would do much to improve security; or better yet, window glass can

be replaced with polycarbonate material giving them extra strength to resist repeated blows while still permitting exit in an emergency.

✓ **Fire Escapes**

Fire escapes provide both a ladder down for the building occupant during an emergency *and* a ladder up to a less secure upper floor for a burglar. Occupants should not do anything that impedes access to a fire escape but there are things that can be done to make it less attractive to the burglar. If an apartment building uses a fire escape, there are a number of battery operated alarms for less than \$40.00 that can be installed to detect the opening of a door or window and sound a loud alarm to alert the occupants. If the fire escape ladder is a pull down or drop down type, a switch can be added to the ladder that sounds a similar alarm both in and outside the building.

It should be kept in mind that just because fire escape doors must be made available for exit, they do not always have to be available for entry from the exterior. In most cases, locks, window guards or screens or even steel doors can be installed to make the exit more resistant to forced entry as long as exit can be made without special tools or knowledge.

✓ **Alarm Systems**

Intrusion alarm systems can provide valuable protection if installed correctly by a reliable vendor and above all, used responsibly. The existence of alarm systems is a major determining factor in the selection of an intruder's targets; most would prefer to go elsewhere when faced with the possibility of an alarm.

– **The System**

An alarm system is composed of three primary elements: sensors, controls and annunciation. Sensors consist of switches, motion detectors, sound or vibration detectors and other devices that are designed to “sense” the presence of an intruder, either the point of entry or when he moves within the residence. Sensors can also take the form of buttons, that the occupant uses to activate a duress alarm. Controls consist of a panel and a keypad into which a code number that arms or disarms the system is entered. Controls also perform other functions that allow flexibility in how and when an alarm system is armed or disarmed. Finally, the annunciation part of the system is the element that sounds the alert of the intrusion and, hopefully, draws the attention of passerbys and the police so that a response can be generated. *All* alarm systems include these functional elements.

– **Protection While The Occupant Is Home**

Many alarm systems designs offer switches for entry doors and one or two motion detectors installed at inside locations where an intruder is most likely to walk after entering. While such designs may work well when the occupant is not at home, in most cases, interior motion detection cannot be used while

the occupant is home. Moreover, pets may inadvertently trip the alarm if they pass in front of a motion detector when the system is armed. If an alarm system is installed, it should allow the occupant and their family and guests to move freely within the unit with the system armed with one or more motion detectors inside that can be enabled when they (and their pets) are away.

– **Inexpensive Alarm Protection**

There are a number of self-contained alarm systems particularly useful to the tenant or condo owner who does not want the benefits of a full-featured, professionally installed system. These small units can be installed on a wall in a corridor or near a protected door or window and sound a loud local alarm if violated. It should be noted, however, that such devices are intended only to alert occupants and to startle an intruder; they should not be used for, nor are they intended to be used to call the police.

– **False Alarms**

A large percentage of electronic alarms reported to police departments are false. For the sake of publication, a “false alarm” is defined as any alarm activation *not* caused by an intruder. False alarms waste police resources, add unnecessary risk to the responding officers and the public in general.

1) **How to Reduce False Alarms**

The following are measures or steps the occupant or tenant can take to reduce false alarms in multi-residential housing:

- a) If the occupant accidentally activates the alarm, they should advise their alarm monitoring company immediately. They need to memorize their pass code.
- b) All alarm users should be trained to use the system and know the codes to arm and disarm the system; including how to cancel a false alarm.
- c) All loose fitting doors and windows with sensors should be tightened. A loose fit may break the sensor contact, even without opening the door/window. Hinges and strike plates should be adjusted so the door can move no more than 1/4".
- d) Do not have anything that will move (pets, plants, balloons, etc.) or stir the air (fans and heaters) in a room that is protected with a motion detector.
- e) Have wide-gap sensors installed on all doors.
- f) Have the sensitivity settings on motion detectors and glass-