

# **SecurPLACE™**

## **Be Aware Campaign A Bright Idea for Apartment Managers**

Brilliant fall colors and Indian Summer breezes traveling through the open windows of our tenant's apartments are now but a memory as we approach the end of the year. As the season cools and the amount of daylight dwindles, we also notice a change in the pattern of crime. Colder weather typically results in lower business crime and street crime in our communities. Conversely, crime increases in the area of residential burglaries, personal larcenies and personal assaults. Criminals have more time to hide in the shadows. Residents, returning with packages from holiday shopping, are particularly good targets. Managers need to be aware of the affect of seasonal change and adjust their practices. Crime statistics dictate a change in our practices and higher risk elements suggest we should respond accordingly. How can you schedule routine activities to ensure a safer and more secure property? What type of risk should you focus on? How can you become more aware of seasonal risk? The answer is simple.

- Lighting
- Landscape
- Locks & Doors
- Laundry rooms

**Lighting** becomes more important as the days become shorter. Statistics would indicate that personal crimes and residential invasions occur during dark hours. Proper lighting ensures safety and security at apartment complexes. Lighting needs to be inspected, cleaned, repaired if necessary and refocused on the site. Checking the good working order and proper alignment of fixtures ensures a secure and safe environment. Pay particular attention to parking areas, parking overhangs, shadows cast by trees and shrubbery, walkways and stairways. Eliminate shadows near entry ways, halls and parking areas.

Review your stock levels of replacement bulbs for exterior and interior lights. Make sure your supply is adequate for your burn out rate. These simple planning practices will assist in ensuring immediate repairs when required.

Documenting such repairs and maintenance goes a long way toward mitigating risk when someone suggests your practices were less than adequate. A separate log entry on a continuing basis for all repairs and maintenance for your apartment buildings will verify your positive response. A complex that invests in better lighting and follow-up always shows better than one that doesn't. Many potential tenants will visit your property simply to evaluate the lighting to ensure their safety and the safety of their families.

Local energy companies in large cities are currently providing a new energy credit with the goal of providing better service while saving you money. A great example are the new CLF-compact light fixtures that provide a 10X longer life span with the use of 75% less energy. Other commercial companies have new and exciting products to review and are available on line for everyone to investigate.

**Be aware** - lighting is more than a "maintenance ticket" item. It is a security, safety and risk management opportunity. Teach your maintenance team members the value of risk management.

**Landscape** is another area where you can positively affect the risk from criminal behavior. Direct your maintenance crews to trim, prune and shape smartly to improve the security for each of your buildings. Trees should be cut high to provide a long line of sight. Shrubs will be trimmed low to provide few areas

to hide. The proper level of grooming offers a crisp, clean view of all doors, pathways, benches, parking areas and walking paths. Extending the line of site provides a longer field of view for people to identify risky situations before entering them.

If this is the time of the year to remove leaves from your property then act as if this was snow and make sure you get them off your property effectively. Should the leaves fall and stay on the ground too long they get wet and slippery. Slip and fall opportunities increase.

Inspect your parking areas and all directional signs to ensure visitors are allowed to park in their correct areas and that your parking restrictions are known. Consider light-reflective paint for concrete porch steps, sidewalk elevation changes, parking lanes and curbs. As we all attempt to reach the magic goal of 100% occupancy the difference for a potential new tenant just might be attractive and appropriate lighting combined with clear directional signs for both parking and traveling about the site. You know that every visitor is a potential new candidate for leasing an apartment.

**Be Aware** - Combined with good lighting practices and landscaping you deliver not only a prudent risk management technique, but an attractive and safe appearing facility.

**Locks and doors** and laundry rooms can be discussed together because in many cases they are inspected at the same time. A regular inspection of your laundry areas will provide the opportunity to replace faulty door hardware or missing or burned out lighting fixtures. Good lighting provides a feeling of safety and security for all. Proper lighting also delivers ample warning and creates a sense of confidence for everyone in this area. The fact that many tenants spend evening hours or early morning hours in these areas suggests you access and secure areas be a priority – especially as these become dark hours. Laundry rooms are often adjacent to storage areas in large complexes.

Storage areas need the same security and safety measures as the laundry areas. The significance of proper lighting and locks for these areas is critical to the overall safety and security of your residents. Tenants want to feel safe and secure in their common areas as they do in their apartments. The laundry rooms are often isolated and imposing areas. Secure access and good lighting go a long way toward reducing risk and anxiety. They also make tenants feel good about their homes.

During the summer months, doors and locking hardware get a lot more use as people travel in and out more frequently. Hall doors, common entrances, doors to storage and laundry areas all get more use. Fall is a perfect time to schedule a review of all door hardware to ensure its functionality. Consider a facility-wide review of interior door hardware and one of exterior door hardware.

All locks should be in good working order, with keyways smoothly operating. Latch bolts should slip easily into their receivers. Latch plates should be firmly mounted to door jambs and secured with at least two to three inch screws. Ensure particularly that all residential unit locks are working well.

All door closures should function smoothly and efficiently. Ensure that doors can latch without requiring anyone to push or pull them to the fully closed position. Make certain that hardware for laundry rooms and storage areas works as well.

**Be Aware** - Door hardware is one of the key measures for ensuring the security of your residents and one most commonly overlooked.

The “Be Aware Campaign” requires little or no extra effort while you are present on your property. The attention to detail will allow potential customers and residents to reap the benefits of being part of a community where you ensure their safety and security are important to you. Effective lighting, properly manicured landscape, secure locks & doors and laundry rooms will only deter crime by eliminating shadows and creating an environment where the confidence of an intruder is almost always minimized.