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Safe Stay - March 2015

Best practices for attractions with—or planning to add—hotels



As more parks and attractions build hotels on their premises, a host of security issues arise for an industry that regards safety as its top priority. While there are numerous areas where traditional theme park security overlaps with strategies specific to hotels, adding accommodations to your property does usher in some distinctly new protocols.

In fact, security is such an integral component of the hotel and resort experience, it's typically addressed in an initial security assessment before ground breaks on new construction. This is when discussions begin about access control, lighting, and closed-circuit cameras, to name a few security fundamentals.

Of course, one of the most expected questions from attraction operators should also be addressed at this point: how to create the perfect blend of fun and security at attraction hotels.

Security by Design: Get Familiar with the CPTED Principles

Keeping your hotel premises secure yet visually pleasant and relaxing can be achieved in part through thoughtful environmental planning, around which an entire school of thought and supporting guidelines exist.

Long followed by law enforcement agencies, architects, and developers around the world, "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" (CPTED) principles are centered on the idea that certain design elements in a physical landscape can influence the behavior and actions of the people who enter this space (or deter them from entering at all).

Tom McElroy of the Hospitality Security Consulting Group LLC, a former law enforcement officer and past security executive for Hilton Hotels Corporation, provides an immediately recognizable example of a CPTED design strategy: "If you've ever wondered what purpose the giant red spheres in front of Target serve, they're barriers to prevent a vehicle from crashing into the building."

It's a strategy, McElroy continues, that's used in countless other places in numerous forms—from concrete pillars and barriers like Target's enormous spheres, to flower planters and fountains. For attraction hotels, this presents the opportunity to place a variety of whimsical, striking structures in and around hotel grounds, serving both security and aesthetic purposes at the same time.

While not replacing the need for human security personnel, such physical structures and landscaping—referred to as "natural access control" in one of the CPTED principles—greatly assists their efforts. (For more details on CPTED principles, see page 63.)

Bucking Conventional Thinking on Security Staff Visibility

An important tip for keeping hotel premises safe and secure, yet still relaxed, may sound counterintuitive:

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make security clearly present to guests. Hotels typically downplay security's presence, but experts like Dick Hudak of Resort Security Consulting think guests, especially children, should be able to clearly identify security staff.

"They don't have to look like Navy SEALs. A security team at a tropical resort, for example, could wear flowered shirts. But hotels should be very proud of their safety and security teams and make guests aware of them," advises Hudak, a former special agent for the United States FBI and past director of corporate security for a number of companies, including the hotel consortium Loews Corporation.

Hudak emphasizes that security personnel should be trained to be what he calls "hospitality sensitive."

"This means interacting with guests, recognizing and greeting them by name. A 'good morning, sir, did your family get over to the park today?' impresses guests. Guests want to be recognized. Bad guys don't—and if they think they've been singled out by security, they may not do something bad, after all," Hudak observes.

Hudak is frank in his belief that female security and safety employees can be particularly effective in the pool area of a hotel, where myriad events can occur—some of them accidentally, others intentional. Painting the floors of pools in bright colors is another strategy he recommends, as it allows lifeguards and staffers to better spot a child who might be in danger.

McElroy also stresses the importance of using customer service basics like guest recognition to strengthen hotel security. "Actually, making guest customer service part of a security program is essential. It goes back to that famous tenet of Ritz-Carlton hotels, which held that 'ladies and gentlemen treat people like ladies and gentlemen,'" McElroy says. What this means specifically, he continues, is that security and employees should make a point of making eye contact with guests and giving them a sense of recognition. Again, it makes the people who want to be recognized feel good, and the ones who don't aware that they're under watch.

Like Hudak, McElroy also agrees with making security transparent to guests, who want to feel comfortable and secure without obvious signs of security like uniformed guards and cameras—although there are definitely specific places for the latter.



How to Limit Liability and Protect Guests at the Same Time

Put simply, cameras in restrooms, gamerooms, parking lots, and pool areas—the places where a security incident is most likely to occur—increase a hotel's liability. The reason? They give guests, especially parents, a higher than reasonable expectation that those premises are being continuously monitored.

But the reality is the security officer tasked with monitoring the cameras is also engaged in a half dozen or so other activities, from checking luggage to answering the phone. Hudak's suggestion: Don't extend security beyond what is reasonable.

"Where guests see a camera, there is a reasonable expectation of a response from security. Instead, place cameras outside the gameroom or outside the restroom, so that guests expect you are monitoring who is going in and out of a room, which is a bit different than assuming the room itself is under continuous surveillance," Hudak explains.

This strategy also better positions the guests to be aware of their own security responsibilities, which both Hudak and McElroy repeatedly underscore is of utmost importance. "Parents, especially, need to know that small children just don't understand the complexities of the adult world. They shouldn't be allowed to run around a hotel unattended," says Hudak.

Of course, how hotels can tactfully relay this message to parents is up to the individual facility. But there are certain things hotels can do that don't involve direct communication. A child dressed in bright clothing, for instance, is easier for parents to spot and keep track of. Hotels with retail shops should consider selling such distinctively colored shirts and swimwear for children.

Taking a cue from theme parks themselves, there are ways to emphasize the concept of security in a hospitality-friendly manner. Legoland Florida has nicely achieved this with its safety and security signs posted

throughout the park, which always begin with the upbeat message, "Let's be safe and have fun!"

And that, of course, should be the ultimate goal of your own attraction's hotel security program.

Stephanie Janard is a frequent contributor to Funworld.

'Crime Prevention Through -Environmental Design' (CPTED) Principles

Although every resort should have adequate security staff on hand, a well-designed property will be even more secure. That's what the "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" principles are all about. There are five main tenets.

Territoriality

This concept distinguishes privately owned space from public and common areas. Among other benefits, its implementation makes unwanted visitors stand out more clearly. Signs are an obvious and basic element of the Territoriality concept, such as "Private" or "Employees Only" or "No Public Access."

Natural Surveillance

Even more effective than a security camera—and thus, more effective for securing a hotel's premises—is the ability of security and safety staff to monitor areas with their own eyes in their daily work routines. Good lighting and unobstructed views are two basic elements of this principle.

Natural Access Control

Beyond posting security personnel at your resort's entrance and exit doors, there are additional methods to control the comings and goings of guests and strangers. Walkways, lighting, gates, and landscaping can all be designed to usher people in the directions you want them to go, and away from the areas you don't.

Maintenance

The key idea behind this principle is twofold. First, keeping trees and shrubbery from becoming overgrown—and thus, turning into ideal hiding spots—is essential. But a well-maintained property serves an additional purpose. It shows that attention is being paid. It conveys orderliness. Both deter would-be criminals.

Activity Support

This involves assigning designated areas for certain activities to take place, which populates them with people who provide instant surveillance.

For more information on CPTED, visit the International CPTED Association's website, www.cpted.net.

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