

RISK IN FOCUS



HOSPITALITY

Protecting Property and Guests: Essential Parking Lot Safety

Introduction

Parking lot safety is a critical part of hospitality security management. For hotels, restaurants, and casinos, parking areas serve as the first and last impression guests have of your property, making it a crucial touchpoint that directly impacts both customer satisfaction and your company's liability exposure.

Taking steps to evaluate and effectively manage conditions in your parking areas for your employees and guests establishes their initial impressions and may also reduce potential liability and financial risk for your business.

The responsibility for parking lot safety extends beyond simple maintenance; it encompasses a comprehensive approach to security, cleanliness, lighting, and emergency preparedness. Today, hospitality companies face evolving challenges, from traditional concerns like vehicle break-ins,

catalytic converter thefts, and slip, trip, and fall incidents, to emerging issues such as homelessness on property grounds. These risks can result in potential harm to guests and staff, negative online reviews, increased insurance premiums, and costly lawsuits.

Business must be able to demonstrate that they are consistently evaluating and taking reasonable steps to identify actual or potential exposures and hazards, notify invitees of such hazards that cannot be immediately corrected, and to improve or correct them in a timely manner.

Creating a strategy will help operators evaluate and enhance parking lot safety protocols, addressing everything from basic security infrastructure to unexpected concerns that businesses face.

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Use of video surveillance cameras for security purposes and remote surveillance should be part of an integrated overall premises safety and security program including a professional analysis; security personnel; and other measures. Surveillance cameras are not a substitute for security personnel or for an effective and comprehensive security program.

Surveillance cameras should be deployed as a part of an overall security program designed after a careful review and analysis of the security needs; security threat assessment of the premises; and should be subject to management and legal review. Upon making a determination that security cameras can be an effective element of a comprehensive security strategy aligned with the exposures, consideration should be given to positioning them in such a way as to monitor entrance and exit points, payment stations, and remote corners.

In some cases, their use and the recorded activity and images that they provide, has the potential to provide a visual account of the circumstances that may be used to increase liability. It is also important to understand that placing signage with any verbiage that a camera is not monitored or is not recorded, etc., does not reduce, limit, or eliminate exposures and liabilities. It may also defeat a legitimate purpose of installing a security camera when signage is posted that cameras are not monitored or recorded.

Any camera installation and positioning must be done in such a way so as to prevent manual and unauthorized re-direction, tampering, obstruction, or damage due to weather, landscape features, rodents and pests, vandalism, etc.

Cameras must be also positioned and of a quality that provides clear, full and unobstructed views of the areas involved including ability to distinguish activity, and individual descriptive features such as vehicle make, model, color, etc., as well as distinguishing features of individuals including complexion, hair and clothing color, footwear and condition of walking surfaces.

Consideration must also be given to varying light levels throughout the day to ensure that images are not too dark or 'washed out' because of excess natural or other lighting.

Monitors and recording hardware and devices should be in an area with limited access and strict access controls. Monitors should be of a reasonable quality and lifespan that limits having images 'burned into' the monitor screens. Multiplexers or other hardware should be considered in order to provide the ability to efficiently monitor multiple images on a single monitor. Recording hardware and software must also be of reasonable quality and capacity in order to maintain video for a minimum period of 30 days. Software should also be considered that allows for the cameras to be remotely monitored or controlled by authorized individuals over secure connections.

Lighting and Visibility Enhancement

Maintaining reasonable lighting levels throughout exterior of the property, including parking areas, provides guests and employees with a safe environment. Well-lit parking lots may deter criminal activity, especially during evening hours. Consider using LED lighting systems, which provide consistent, bright illumination and energy efficiency with longer lifespans than traditional lighting options.

Be sure to regularly inspect and replace burnt-out bulbs, clean light fixtures, and trim vegetation that may obstruct lighting effectiveness. Shadows and dark corners create opportunities for criminal activity and increase the likelihood of accidents. Implement and document a scheduled maintenance program that includes monthly lighting assessments and immediate repair protocols for any identified issues.



Surface Maintenance and Hazard Prevention

Surface areas are important to keep clean and well-maintained, as even minor issues can result in serious injuries and costly liability claims. Conduct and document regular inspections to identify and address trip hazards including potholes, uneven surfaces, debris, raised concrete sections, and sudden elevation changes throughout parking areas and walkways. When hazards cannot be repaired immediately, implement clear marking systems using bright paint or reflective tape to alert guests and reduce accident risks.

Inclement weather can also create issues for guests while walking or driving in your parking area. Develop and document comprehensive winter weather protocols that include timely removal of snow and ice from all parking surfaces and pedestrian walkways. Apply ice treatment at least twice daily — once in the morning and again in the late afternoon, or as weather is bad — to prevent refreezing and minimize slip-and-fall incidents. Maintain adequate supplies of de-icing materials and establish and document clear procedures for emergency weather response.

Consider the safety of guests who did not drive to your business. Designate safe waiting areas within your lobby or near main entrances where guests can comfortably wait for rideshare services, taxis, or personal transportation away from potential parking lot hazards. These protected spaces reduce guest exposure to weather elements and security risks while providing controlled environments where staff can monitor guest welfare.

Working with Snow Removal Contractors

Use of third-party companies is an opportunity to ensure clean and safe parking areas for guests before, during, and after inclement weather to handle snow and ice removal. Strong communications and working relationships with these contractors is crucial for the safety of guests and to protect against liability. When hiring a third-party to handle snow and ice removal, it is important to have a contract and ensure the contractor adheres to the agreement. **Consider the following when engaging with a third-party contractor:**

- + Confirm they have general liability insurance.
- + Get a certificate of insurance naming you as an additional insured.
- + Ensure they provide a waiver of subrogation.

Business will also want to have monitoring protocols in place to make sure jobs are completed correctly and contingency plans are ready in case the contractor is unavailable.

Guest Safety and Security Enhancements

If conditions in the area of the business warrant it, conduct a comprehensive risk and security assessment to determine if implementing and installing key card-access gates and perimeter fencing to create controlled access points that deter vehicle break-ins, theft, and unauthorized property access. While representing a significant investment, these security measures can reduce crime rates and enhance overall guest confidence in your property's safety commitment.

If implementing key card access or fencing is too expensive, consider offering valet parking services, which provide the dual benefit of enhanced customer service and continuous staff monitoring of parking areas. Valet attendants serve as natural security presence while ensuring vehicles are properly positioned and monitored throughout guests' visits.



Staff Training and Guest Signage

Training staff, and consistently following up on the training, is always a key element in safety protocols. Implement comprehensive staff training programs that cover security protocols, suspicious behavior recognition, and proper incident response procedures. Well-trained staff members serve as your first line of defense against security threats and can often prevent incidents through early intervention and appropriate escalation procedures.

Installing clear, visible signage throughout parking areas instructing guests to remove all valuables from vehicles and secure their cars properly. While guests bear personal responsibility for their belongings, providing these reminders demonstrates your commitment to their security and can help reduce theft opportunities.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Take proactive measures to reduce instances of homelessness on your property by capping off outside water and electrical connections that might attract unauthorized camping, maintaining well-trimmed landscaping that eliminates hiding places, and posting appropriate signage regarding local ordinances on loitering. These steps, while sensitive in nature, help maintain safe environments for paying guests while directing individuals in need toward appropriate community resources.

For properties experiencing frequent security incidents or break-ins, consider conducting a formal and comprehensive security and risk assessment which may require the investment in professional third-party security services or virtual security guard systems to provide enhanced monitoring and rapid response capabilities. These solutions can often prove more cost-effective than dealing with repeated incidents and their associated costs.



Conclusion

Effective parking lot safety requires ongoing commitment of management and financial resources, regular assessment, and proactive investment in security infrastructure. Implementing comprehensive safety measures can significantly reduce liability risks, enhance guest satisfaction, and protect their reputation in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Improving parking lot safety is not a one-time solution but rather an evolving process that must adapt to changing security challenges and guest expectations. Regular evaluation of your parking lot safety protocols, combined with staff training and guest communication, creates the foundation for a secure environment that supports your business success while prioritizing the wellbeing of everyone who visits your property.





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