Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

"CPTED" is the proper design and effective use of the built environment which may lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement of the quality of life" (National Crime Prevention Institute).

The best time to apply this philosophy is in the design phase, before a building or neighborhood is constructed. However, you can also successfully apply it later by making simple changes like landscaping and lighting.

The use of CPTED will reduce crime and fear by reducing criminal opportunity and fostering positive social interaction among legitimate users of space. A legitimate user means one who is using a space for its intended purpose. The emphasis is on prevention rather than apprehension and punishment.

Three Basic Principles

Natural Surveillance:

We need to create environments where there is plenty of opportunity for people engaged in their normal behavior to observe the space around them. By designing the placement of physical features, activities and people in such a way to maximize visibility, natural surveillance occurs.

- Lighting – street lights should be well spaced and in working order, alleys and parking areas should also be lit. Lighting should also reflect the intended hours of operation, i.e. lighting of playfields or structures in local parks may actually encourage after hours criminal activities. Motion-sensing lights perform the double duty of providing light when needed and letting trespassers know that "they have been seen."
- Landscaping – Generally uniformly shaped sites are safer than irregularly shaped sites because there are fewer hiding places. Plants should follow the 3-8 rule of thumb; hedges no higher than 3 feet, and tree canopies starting no lower than 8 feet. This is especially important around entryways and windows; do not block access.
- Fencing – Fences should allow people to see in. Even if the fences are built for privacy, they should be of a design that is not too tall and has some visibility.

- Windows – Windows that look out on streets and alleys are good natural surveillance, especially bay windows. These should not be blocked. Retirees, stay at home parents, and people working from home offices can provide good surveillance for the neighborhood during the day.

Natural Access Control:

Most criminal intruders will try to find a way into an area where they will not be easily observed.

Limiting access and increasing natural surveillance keeps them out altogether or marks them as an intruder. By selectively placing entrances and exits, fencing, lighting and landscape to control the flow of or limit access, natural access control occurs.
- Personal residences with front and back doors that are clearly visible and well lit.
- Use low, thorny bushes beneath ground level windows.
- Eliminate design features that provide access to roofs or upper levels
- In front yard, use waist-level, picket-type fencing along residential property lines to control access
- Use a locking gate between front and backyards.
- Use shoulder-level, open-type fencing along lateral residential property lines between side yards and extending to between back yards. They should be sufficiently unencumbered with landscaping to promote social interaction between neighbors

Natural Territorial Reinforcement:

An environment designed to clearly delineate private space does two things. First, it creates a sense of ownership. Owners have a vested interest and are more likely to challenge intruders or report them to the police. Second, the sense of owned space creates an environment where "strangers" or "intruders" stand out and are more easily identified.

By using buildings, fences, pavement, signs, lighting and landscape to express owners and define public, semi-public, and private space, natural territorial reinforcement occurs.
- Front porches and apartment balconies add to street surveillance.
- Maintained premises and landscaping such that it communicates an alert and active presence occupying the space.
- Clear transitions between private, semi-private, and public areas.
- Traffic plans that consider the size of the neighborhood. People drive by "feel" more than speed limits; a wide, two lane residential street can lead to speeding. Roundabouts (traffic circles), a one-way street with parking on both sides, or increasing the size of curbs can help to calm traffic.

Why the emphasis on "Natural?"

Historically, the emphasis has been on the target hardening approach to crime prevention. Relying on mechanical (locks, security systems, alarms, monitoring equipment, etc.) and organized (security patrols, law enforcement, etc.) crime prevention strategies means to make the target harder to get into and can create a fortress effect and "feel" unsafe. This traditional approach tends to overlook the opportunity for natural access control and surveillance. By natural, reference is made to the crime prevention by-product that comes from normal and routine use of an environment.