

## Parking Lot Security

Tips and tricks every facility professional should know.

By Tom Asp

When companies look to ensure the security and safety of their employees, often their first thoughts are about the place where employees spend the most time—their offices or the main building. Crucial to any comprehensive security plan, however, is making sure the area where employees are perhaps most vulnerable is also properly protected—the parking lot or parking garage.

Whether an expansive surface lot or multi-story garage, parking facilities are more likely to be the setting of a crime than any other type of location outside of a residence. These facilities are open, accessible areas where controlling access is nearly impossible—and most certainly not economically feasible. So how can fms make sure security and safety measures are up to date in parking facilities? Here are some key points to consider.

**Landscaping:** In a surface lot, shrubbery and trees might be attractive additions to facilities, but all landscaping elements should remain low to the ground, minimizing the ability for someone to use them as a hiding place after dark. Fms must keep in mind that all landscaping must be continually maintained and pruned—even a small bush can become a large one given enough time.

**Lighting:** This is perhaps the most important deterrent to crime in a parking facility. Because improperly placed lighting can affect a driver's ability to see properly at night, lighting should be placed, where possible, at uniform distances and over rows of parked cars (not directly over drive paths). Fixtures should be vandal proof, reliable, and easy to maintain. In some cases, the walls or other areas of a garage can be whitewashed or painted a light color to reflect natural light and increase overall illumination within the facility.

**Video surveillance:** Installing cameras can be both a highly effective visible deterrent as well as an important tool in identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting a perpetrator. Cameras should also be mounted as high as possible to be out of reach from vandals and to be able to see over sport utility vehicles and other obstacles. Fms should consider a mix of pan, tilt, zoom cameras that can be used to see many different areas of the facility. These units should be used in conjunction with a fixed or IP megapixel camera that continually monitors entrances and exits to identify vehicles as well as specific license plates for identification purposes.

**Emergency mass notification:** These systems are particularly useful in areas where severe weather events, such as tornados, are common. If an employee or patron is entering a parking lot during such an event, the emergency notification device can direct him or her to a specific part of the parking area for shelter. These systems also can broadcast pre-recorded or live messages in the event of an emergency situation inside the adjoining building, alerting the individual that it is not safe to enter.

**Emergency call boxes:** These devices should be strategically placed in well lit areas (near an exit stairwell in a parking structure, for instance) or centrally located in a surface lot. Typically, the call boxes will be recognizable to employees and visitors because of the blue light, signifying help in an emergency. Cameras in facilities should be set to view and record the blue light box automatically any time it is activated.

Even small steps can enhance the security of facilities. Well placed signage can help direct employees and visitors in and out of the facility more quickly, making them less vulnerable targets. If applicable, fms can consider adding signage that indicates the area is under video surveillance as an added deterrent. Also, ensuring that the surroundings are free of litter and graffiti can elevate the perception that the facility is well maintained and secure.

Fms should also be aware of any applicable local building codes (such as light pole heights or landscaping requirements) that might restrict certain elements of parking lot design. Security experts can often assist with these matters. ■

*Asp is the president of the board of directors of Security-Net, a global provider of security integration services. Security-Net is comprised of 50 regional offices and 1,500 security professionals positioned across the U.S., Canada, and abroad.*

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