

risk alert



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Perimeter lighting and safety

Poor exterior lighting can increase unwanted or unintended events. This holds true for worship centers. Recently in Texas, a member was heading to her vehicle after an evening service and tripped on a drain in the parking lot. The injury she sustained required surgery. Insufficient lighting was to blame for this accident. In Maryland, a maintenance equipment shed at a worship center was broken into during the night, and someone drove off with the riding mower and other lawn tools. No barriers were in place to restrict access to the property, and there was no security lighting near the shed.



These two claims highlight the need for exterior safety and lighting but for different reasons—discouraging prowlers and maintaining safety for all who come to your facility.

Danger lurks in the dark

Safe movement for those who come to a house of worship is especially important after dark. Proper lighting can produce a more secure and attractive atmosphere. It is imperative to light all areas around the building, paying special attention to the main driving thoroughfare and walking pathways. Lighting needs to be at all doorways, steps and stairwells. A photoelectric cell (dusk-to-dawn switch) that is on permanently during the hours of darkness provides for the appropriate timing for illumination.

Almost half of all robberies occur between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. Law enforcement officials believe that proper lighting is a strong deterrent for these law-breaking activities. Improved visibility also aids one's ability to identify and give an accurate description of the criminal to authorities.

Seeing your surroundings through the trees

After lighting, safety consultants consider natural surveillance—the ability to observe one's surroundings—to be the next most critical design issue for security. Openness enhances natural surveillance. Shrubbery and other plantings should be kept to a minimum and trimmed to eliminate hiding places. The worship facility should always be well maintained. An unkempt lawn or rubbish scattered about gives the impression that the area is not secure.

Walking routes should be carefully planned to consider entry/exit pathways. During low traffic periods, restricting access to a main entrance rather than allowing entry through numerous doorways improves the ability to see and be seen by others. Discourage shortcuts over landscaping. Direct walking routes onto designated walkways.

(Over)

Signage points in the right direction

Careful placement of signs can help familiarize visitors to their surroundings and allow them to move safely about the area. Signage also can assure congregants that their safety is being monitored. Likewise, a notice that they are under surveillance may deter potential perpetrators.

Fence out intruders

Security screens or fences can be provided in areas of low activity yet still maintain openness and natural surveillance. Fencing or caging is essential to protect ground-level air conditioning units and deter theft.

Likewise, limiting vehicular access to a minimum number of entrance/exit locations is beneficial. Fencing, grilles, gates and other barriers provide control of traffic flow and help deter casual trespassing by controlling access to entrances during unattended hours.

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