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Want to Deter Crime? Think CPTED

Forget alarms. Forget stiff prison sentences. Even forget about police presence. One of the best deterrents against crime is called CPTED.

You've Never Heard Of CPTED?

It stands for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, and is among the most pro-active crime-fighting approaches you can adopt.

CPTED can be applied widely, to businesses such as shopping malls and industrial/commercial parks, but is also to residential areas, schools, institutions, parks, and playgrounds. It is based on a simple theory: that the proper design and effective use of a physical environment can help reduce the incidence and fear of crime.

This approach can mean such basic changes as turning a store manager's desk around so that they can observe the sales floor better - it costs nothing, it's common sense, and it's highly effective.

Traditionally, the "target-hardening" approach focuses on the use of physical or artificial barriers to deny access to a crime target - locks, alarms, fences, gates and the like.

This approach often works well, yet places a constraint on the use, access and enjoyment of the "hardened" environment. Beyond that, many "natural", less obtrusive opportunities to deter crime were overlooked.

CPTED revolves around three strategies:

- **Natural Surveillance:** Keep potential intruders under observation.
- **Natural Access Control:** Decrease the crime opportunity.
- **Territorial Reinforcement:** Create or extend a *sphere of influence* through a physical design, so that the users of an area develop a sense of ownership over it.

These points seem basic, and in effect they are. They see surveillance, access control and the resulting crime reduction as a by-product of the normal and routine use of the environment.

The Three D's

All this sounds quite vague, so let's get a bit more specific. Some of the particular CPTED strategies are listed below. To know which to use, you must first assess the physical environment you're looking to protect by running through the three D's.

All space has a *Designated* purpose. It has social, cultural, legal or physical *Definitions* that suggest the desired and acceptable behaviours. And it's *Designed* to support and control those behaviours. These are some of the questions that follow the three D's.

What is the designated purpose of the space? How well does the space support its current use? Its intended use? Where are the space's borders? Is it clear who "owns" it? Are the legal or administrative rules clearly set out and reinforced? Are there signs? Does the physical design conflict or impede with the productive use of the space? Is there confusion over the way that the physical design is intended to control human behaviour?

Answer these questions, and you can begin to apply some of the most common CPTED strategies:

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- Clearly define the borders of the controlled space.
- Clearly mark the transitional zones that indicate movement from semi-public to private space.
- Relocate gathering areas to spots with natural surveillance and access control.
- Place unsafe activities in "safe" spots. You'll overcome the vulnerability of these activities with the safe area's natural surveillance and access control. Place safe activities in "unsafe" locations to increase the perception of safety within these areas.
- Redesignate the use of space to provide natural barriers to conflicting activities.
- Improve the scheduling of space to allow for effective use.
- Redesign the space to increase the perception or reality of natural surveillance.
- Overcome distance and isolation through improved design efficiencies and communications.

What does all this mean in practice? Let's look at one example of a local restaurant that received a CPTED review from Peel Regional Police Constable Tom McKay of Crime Prevention Services.

One recommendation was to improve the sightlines to the outside by removing unnecessary clutter (e.g. bushy plants, promotional material) from the take-out window. Another suggestion was to improve the sightlines within the restaurant by removing the planters that divided the dining room and waiting area.

Both these recommendations aimed to make the take-out/waiting area seem less private - and therefore more intimidating - to someone who might want to rob the place. The changes also gave the staff a greater chance to observe potential offenders before a robbery.

A third recommendation suggested repairing defective ceiling lamps around the take-out area, and increasing the number of fixtures. From a psychological standpoint, the improved lighting discourages a would-be offender. In case of a robbery, staff and customers could also give better descriptions of the offenders.

As with all CPTED activities, the goal isn't to create a totally crime-free environment. That's impossible. The objective is to simply reduce the probability of crime by designing and using an environment in a way that naturally deters offenders.

Click Here For Cpted Case Studies

Contact either the [Peel Regional Police, Crime Prevention Services](#) or one of the [Mississauga Crime Prevention](#) for a more thorough explanation of how CPTED can work for you.