

Secure Parking Facilities

Whether an organization owns a parking structure or provides parking facilities to employees through a third party, there are a number of associated risks that must be addressed. In addition to slip and fall hazards, those utilizing a parking structure could be vulnerable to auto accidents, theft, harassment and assault. To compound the issue, parking lots and structures typically have lax security, which can make protecting employees and patrons all the more difficult. Thankfully, there are a number of measures parking structure owners and property managers can implement to mitigate the above risks—measures that employers should also look for when utilizing a third party for their parking needs.

Design

Reducing the risks associated with parking structures and parking lots can begin as early as the initial design phase. There are a number of elements to consider to promote overall safety.

For instance, stairwells and elevators should be located in areas where they are readily visible to an attendant, on-site security officer or the general public. If possible, elevators and stairwells should have glass incorporated into their construction for improved visibility. That way, in the event of an incident, onlookers can easily assess the situation and provide the appropriate help.

In addition, installing cylindrical concrete supports instead of square ones allows drivers to more easily see around corners, thus reducing the number of auto accidents. Speed bumps placed on long straightaways can prevent drivers from accelerating to dangerous speeds.

Overall, a strong parking structure design will encourage a pedestrian's natural surveillance—one's ability to observe and assess his or her surroundings. Ensuring that patrons and the general public can easily view everything that's going on in the structure can help prevent auto accidents and deter potential criminals.

While full visibility is generally easier to achieve in open parking lots, there are a number of tactics that can improve natural surveillance in a parking structure. Some strategies include constructing high ceilings, trimming

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back any shrubbery that obstructs views, creating sightlines from the parking structure to the street, and limiting the number of entrances and exits to the parking structure.

Signage

Posting different types of signage in and around a parking structure can bolster overall safety in a variety of ways. For instance, stop signs that are strategically placed around turns or long straightaways can limit accidents by slowing down drivers.

In addition, signage can help clearly direct pedestrians to important safety items—exits, elevators, emergency

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phones, fire extinguishers, etc.—or away from the path of vehicles. It's important for each floor of a parking structure to be clearly labeled to further direct pedestrians, allowing them to move in and out of the structure quickly and safely.

In general, signage should utilize a large font and bold colors. This ensures that signs will catch the eye and be easy to read.

Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important aspects of parking structure and lot safety. This is because proper lighting practices can reduce the risk of theft, harassment and assault, as it eliminates potential hiding places from security or passersby.

In general, parking facilities should have no major dark spots, and heavily trafficked areas should be well-lit. Most experts suggest that areas in the structure or lot be illuminated by at least two sources of light.

Specifically, lighting in a structure or lot should take into account the following:

- **Intensity.** Avoid soft lighting whenever possible. Most parking facilities utilize metal halide lighting, as it is both bright and easy on the human eye.
- **Uniformity.** When lighting a parking facility, keep in mind that overlapping areas of light is recommended. This will help ensure that there are no major shadows. For added safety, the perimeters of garages and lots should also be illuminated.

Access Control

Many employers look for access control measures—automatic gates, card access, etc.—when considering parking structure and lot safety.

Commonly, parking facilities utilize a ticketing system that requires patrons to purchase access to parking. While this does not completely eliminate access of the parking facility to the general public, it does provide a paper trail that law enforcement officials can follow in the event of an incident.

Fencing placed around the perimeter of a lot or in private areas of a structure can also be a particularly useful access control measure, as it reduces the potential for trespassing. It may also be a good idea to fence off potential hiding areas, like gaps under stairwells or dark corners in elevator lobbies, for would-be attackers. These barriers typically consist of concrete blocks or chain-link fencing.

In general, the above measures are best implemented in the initial design and building of the lot or structure.

Surveillance and Security Measures

For ongoing, 24-hour safety, active security systems are often the best option—especially for parking structures. There are a number of surveillance and security measures to consider, all with their own unique benefits, including the following:

- **Security personnel.** Simply having a uniformed security officer on site can be enough to deter potential criminals. To be effective, patrol officers will have to vary their routes and schedules to avoid creating predictable gaps in security coverage.
- **Closed circuit television (CCTV).** CCTV is a strong method of surveillance, as it creates an instant record of incidents such as theft, assault or auto accidents. Because CCTV is dependent on visibility, appropriate lighting measures will need to be in place in order for the surveillance to be effective. In addition, without a proper response plan in place, CCTV could be a wasted expense. Ensure that your staff is trained on what to do when an incident occurs.

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- **Emergency phones and intercoms.** Easy access to emergency phones and intercoms can be critical if a patron is under attack or if there is another emergency. These systems are best installed in well-lit and easy-to-reach areas near elevators, lobbies, stairs and parking spots.

For added safety, consider including signage that clearly states that the area is under surveillance. This can be a strong deterrent for criminals.

General Upkeep

Ongoing housekeeping is important for continued safety. When a parking facility is littered with garbage, it can appear as though no one is responsible for the area and that surveillance is lax. Regularly inspect the facility, cleaning debris and removing abandoned vehicles when applicable.

Maintenance crews should also be responsible for trimming back any shrubbery. In general, it's important that things like bushes and tree branches do not block any sightlines in and out of the parking structure. Doing so will promote natural surveillance and eliminate potential hiding spots for criminals.

Snow Removal

Prompt removal of ice and snow can greatly reduce the risks of slips and falls. When removing snow and ice from a parking garage, keep in mind the following:

- Snow should never be piled on top of a parking structure, as this can put too much strain on the supports, which, in turn, could lead to collapse. Experts suggest safely dumping the snow over the sides of the parking structure or loading it into trucks and moving it off the premises.
 - Be careful when using snowplows, as their sharp blades can damage concrete. Experts suggest leaving the blade at least half of an inch above the concrete surface.
- Plowing should never be done near any of the parking garage's joints or curbs, as damage to these supports can lead to structural issues. As such, it's important to clearly and prominently label these areas, especially if you utilize a third party for snow removal.
 - When removing ice, sand is generally preferred over road salt. This is because many de-icing agents and chemicals are rendered useless during times of extreme cold.

As snow and ice melts, utilize "wet floor" signage in areas where fall hazards are especially prevalent. To further decrease the risk of falls, immediately repair any cracks in the concrete caused by wintery conditions.

Mitigating Risk Starts Early On

In order to implement the preventive safety and maintenance measures listed above, many parking structure and lot owners have professional risk assessments done. These assessments can help identify major risk areas, providing businesses with strategies on how to address potential hazards. Risk assessments should be done early on to ensure that parking structure and lot owners are proactive instead of reactive.

It should be noted that risk management for parking structures and lots is an ongoing process. The key to keeping patrons safe is knowing what hazards to anticipate and how to address them.

For insight into more industry-specific risks, contact Baldwin Krystyn Sherman Partners today.