

CRIME PREVENTION

Does your church have a monitored central station alarm system?

A monitored security alarm system can be a significant deterrent to criminals. It also assists in disrupting any crime that is attempted against the church building.

Hazard Example(s):

- Two teenagers broke into an Ohio church at 2 a.m. The church had a monitored security alarm system. The security monitoring company contacted police, who arrived and found the teenagers carrying a safe out of the building. The two teenagers were arrested and several thousand dollars worth of computer and audio-visual equipment belonging to the church was recovered.

Recommendation:

An effective deterrent to criminal break-ins, arson, and vandalism is a monitored central station alarm system. The alarm system consists of the following components:

- Motion sensors installed in strategic locations;
- Keypad;
- Alarm siren; and
- Alarm control panel.

The system operates in the following manner:

- The system is armed by the last person leaving the building and disarmed by the first person to arrive.
- Persons with authorized access to the building are provided with a pass code number and password.
- The system is programmed with entrance and exit delays to allow persons to arm and exit, or enter and disarm, without setting off the alarm.
- In the event of a break-in, the siren sounds and the control panel sends a message to the monitoring company.
- The monitoring company will typically telephone the church to find out if there is a false alarm. If someone answers, they will be asked for their name and password. If the person is an authorized user, the alarm will be canceled. If not (or if there is no answer), police will be dispatched and the church emergency contact will be notified.
- The church's heat and smoke detectors can also be tied into the system, so that if those detectors are activated, the same process will be followed except that the fire department will be notified.
- To assist with deterrence, post warning signs at different locations throughout the church property and place warning stickers on windows and doors.

Many different alarm systems are available. Prices and monthly monitoring fees vary. To select a system, meet with representatives from several companies and select the system that best meets your needs. You may also wish to consult with local police or fire officials.

Tasks:

1. Central station alarm system

Hire a qualified security contractor to inspect the building and grounds and install an appropriate monitored security alarm system.

Does your church utilize security cameras?

Security video cameras can be an effective deterrent to crime as well as a valuable tool in capturing activities at the church that can be reviewed if there is an allegation of wrongdoing.

Recommendation:

With advances in technology, the cost to install video security cameras has decreased dramatically. Cameras send images through a closed-circuit television (CCTV) to recorders and monitors. The images can be stored either locally or in cloud-based storage. The images can also be viewed over the Internet from a remote location.

There are a number of different types of video systems and cameras that are available. To select a system, meet with representatives from several companies and select the system that best meets your needs.

Tasks:

1. Security Cameras

Hire a qualified surveillance contractor to inspect the building and grounds and install appropriate security cameras.

Are the building and grounds properly secured?

While the use of a security alarm, fire alarm, security cameras and fire suppression sprinkler systems in every facility would be ideal, many churches are not in a financial position to install these systems. Even without security and fire alarm systems, though, there are a number of steps that churches can take at little or no cost to protect themselves from crimes such as burglary, arson, and vandalism. Making sure the buildings and grounds are secure is one of these steps.

Hazard Example(s):

A transient entered a church utility room that was unlocked during the overnight hours. He lit a can of Sterno to warm himself, then knocked over the can. Fire quickly spread from the utility room to the surrounding church building. Damage to the building was over \$100,000.

\$10,000 in property was stolen from a church in Washington. There was no sign of forced entry, as the doors had simply been left unlocked. The church had a security alarm system, but the system had not been turned on.

Recommendation:

To adequately secure your building and grounds to deter crime, the items listed should be followed:

- Make sure that doors and windows are locked when the building is unoccupied.
- Use one-inch deadbolt locks on exterior doors. Doors should be made of solid core (not hollow) construction preferably metal (including the doorframe) and, if hinged on the outside, should have tamper-proof hinges.
- Lock windows and consider burglar-resistant or wire-mesh glass.
- Maintain key control, particularly when there has been a turnover in employees. Also, keep a record of who has a key.
 - Documenting who is in possession of a key at any given time.
 - Always re-key or replace the door locks when a key is lost.
 - Eliminate or limit the use of a master key.
 - Keep back-up keys in a locked key box.
- Lock up ladders, tools, and flammable liquids such as cleaning supplies and gasoline at the end of the day.
- Secure stairways and fire escapes that provide access to the roof.
- Prior to leaving the building for the day, a responsible person should tour the building and grounds to make sure all doors and windows are locked.

Tasks:

1. Security Inspection - Evaluate the building and grounds to determine what steps can be taken to help increase the safety and security of the facility against crime.
2. Security policy - Develop and implement a written policy regarding the church's procedures on securing the building and grounds to deter crime
3. Security policy training - Train all employees and/or volunteers whose jobs are impacted by the procedures outlined in your church's policy on securing the building and grounds to deter crime.

Is adequate exterior lighting installed?

Security lighting will aid in the detection of intruders, deter intruders, or in some cases simply increase the feeling of safety. However, it is critical that the lighting be designed carefully, as poorly arranged lighting can create glare which actually obstructs vision and subjects itself to vandalism.

Recommendation(s):

The following lighting guidelines should be incorporated into your crime prevention strategies:

- Exterior lighting should be installed covering all sides of the building including parking lots, walkways and entry/exit doors.
- Lighting fixtures should be protected through the use of plastic lenses or metal screens over the fixtures.
- Consider installing motion-activated lighting near entry/exit doors.
- Keep interior entry lights on during overnight hours. This will give the illusion that the building is occupied.
- Update timers for interior/exterior lights following time changes.

Tasks:

1. Security lighting

Hire a licensed electrician to install exterior security lighting around the exterior of the building.

Is the landscaping around the building designed to deter crime?

Criminals will often target buildings with hiding spots or limited visibility from the street. Their ideal target is a building they can get into and out of quickly or those surrounded by large hedges or shrubs, which serve to hamper visibility from the street and neighboring buildings. It is important to maintain the landscape around your building, thus making it less desirable to criminals. A few alterations to the landscaping and plant materials can be enough to discourage intruders.

Ground cover plants:

Ground cover plants, including perennial and annual plants, can be used within six feet of the edge of walkways and play areas. The height of these plants should not exceed two feet at maturity. Plants with thin stalks that are taller than two feet can be used if they still allow visual surveillance of the area.

Shrubs:

Shrubs should be used between six and twelve feet from the edge of walkways requiring visual surveillance. Their height should not exceed three feet at maturity. If they are taller, they should have thin stalks to allow for visual surveillance. Trim shrubbery and trees so doors and window are visible to neighbors and from the street.

Trees:

Tree limbs should be pruned to six feet above ground. When planting, consider the location of light poles and fixtures so that illumination will not be blocked at night.

Barrier plants:

Barrier plants have thorns or needles and a dense structure. They should be used below and to the sides of windows and next to fences and walls where access is not needed or desired.

Borders:

Bark or wood chip borders between the lawn and the building or residence can be replaced with decorative gravel. A prowler walking on a rock surface will likely make more noise than he would walking on wood chips, possibly alerting the occupants. Do not place large rocks or other items near glass window or doors. These could provide the burglar with needed break-in tools. River rock (stone) and other masonry materials such as brick that are normally used for landscaping accents, borders or scuppers should be grouted to prevent removal by hand.

Trellises:

Place trellises where they can't be used as ladders to gain entry to upper floors.

Recommendation(s):

The following precautions should be taken concerning landscaping around your buildings:

- Keep shrubs and trees trimmed around windows and doors to eliminate potential hiding places for arsonists and criminals.
- Consider prickly or thorny plants beneath lower level windows to discourage break-ins.
- Do not allow signs or displays to block the view of the building.
- Pick up trash and other combustible materials from church property.
- Trash containers should be stored away from buildings. If a fire is intentionally set, this will stop the potential spread of fire to adjacent buildings.
- Use of large rocks for landscaping should be discouraged as these can be used to break windows.
- Tree limbs should be pruned to six feet above ground. When planting, consider the location of light poles and fixtures so that illumination will not be blocked at night.

Tasks:

1. Evaluate the landscaping

Evaluate the landscaping around the building to determine if its designed and maintained in a fashion that will help deter crime.

2. Correct landscaping

Correct any conditions with the landscaping found during the evaluation that could potentially aid criminals or impede being able to properly monitor the area.

Have church members and neighbors been contacted to help watch the building and grounds for suspicious activities?

Having your premises monitored during periods of inactivity serves as a deterrent to criminal activity because it increases the chances of the criminal being caught.

Neighborhood Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear. Neighborhood Watch fights the isolation that crime both creates and feeds upon. It forges bonds among area residents, helps reduce burglaries and robberies, and improves relations between police and the communities they serve.

Recommendation:

The following two items should be incorporated into your crime prevention strategies:

- Establish a "Church Watch" program in which members volunteer to drive through the property at various times throughout the week and alert police to anything suspicious.
- Ask neighbors to contact police to report suspicious persons or activities.

Tasks:

1. Church and neighborhood watch programs

Implement both Neighborhood and Church watch programs to help catch and deter criminal behavior.

Have the local authorities been contacted to assist with crime prevention?

The local authorities are often your best resource for obtaining information regarding crime prevention. This information may be as simple as obtaining an informational brochure to having them conduct a walk-through of your facility or even having them provide training to your employees on a particular crime related issue facing the community.

Recommendation:

A relationship with the local authorities is a sound crime prevention strategy. These departments will become familiar with your daily activities and inactivity. They will be able to offer guidance and assistance in reducing your exposure to crime. Relationships should include the following:

- Develop positive relationships with local police and invite them to patrol the property at odd hours.
- Familiarize police with times of worship and church activities so that they will be alerted when people are unexpectedly present.
- Call your local police and fire departments to request a fire prevention and security evaluation.

Tasks:

1. Local authorities' relationship

In an effort to help protect the church, build a relationship with the local police and fire department.

Does your church have any fine art, rare books, valuable collectibles or other rare items on its premises?

Recommendations:

To guard against theft or damage of high value items kept on the church premises:

- Keep the valuables in a secured location, preferably in a locked fireproof safe.
- Maintain an inventory or schedule of such items including a detailed description and value. Consider having an appraiser determine the value of artwork, rare books, collectibles, and other items whose value is not readily determined.
- Consider photographing and/or videotaping high value items.
- Maintain a copy of the inventory/schedule, photographs, and videotape off site.

Tasks:

1. Valuables inventory

Conduct a written inventory of all church valuables and keep the inventory in a separate secure off site location.

2. Valuables storage

Store valuables in a secure location, if possible, in a fireproof location.