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## CPTED Basics

**Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design** (CPTED) is a crime prevention concept widely used as a guide to evaluate the physical security of a building or environment. CPTED is defined as "the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement of quality of life." By using basic CPTED principles as a guide, you can easily evaluate the security of your home or property and make affordable enhancements that will help make the area safer.

Every environment has three types of **CPTED actors** or people who interact with the space in some way. These actors consist of **normal users**, **abnormal users**, and **observers**. The idea behind CPTED is to create an environment where the normal users are encouraged to use the space while the abnormal users are encouraged to move along. CPTED also works by making it easier for passerby's to pay attention to what is going on in the space. These observers can help enhance security in the area by reporting any suspicious or criminal activity that they see.

The four key principles that make CPTED work are:

- 1) **Natural Surveillance**
- 2) **Natural Access Control**
- 3) **Territorial Reinforcement**
- 4) **Target Hardening**

Using several types of examples, I will explain each of these core concepts and how they can be used.

**Natural Surveillance** refers to the ability to see in and out of an area. Crooks do not like being observed committing crimes. At the same time, being able to see and be seen on your property is a crucial component of security. Every once in a while a suspicious noise wakes my wife and I up in the middle of the night. When this happens, I usually get up and look out the window to see where the sound is coming from and if I should worry about it. Checking on suspicious sounds is extremely important; however, if the lighting around my home is inadequate or if the landscaping has grown up around my windows, I will probably have a hard time seeing anything at all. Conversely, if my neighbor (an **observer**) looks out his window at 2 AM, it is to my advantage if they can clearly see around my home. The same is true of police officers driving by on patrol in the middle of the night.

Take advantage of natural surveillance by trimming back vegetation and landscaping to eliminate all areas of potential concealment. Keep shrubs and bushes trimmed below ground level windows and trees cut up above eye level. Also consider turning porch lights on at night and adding enhanced lighting in dark areas around your property.

**Natural Access Control** means controlling access to an area in some way and having a way to deny access if necessary. Access control can be achieved by using fencing, gates, and even landscaping. A classic example is a gate and fence around a back yard. The fence sends a powerful message to **abnormal users** (or people who should not be there), that the property is cared for and that you need permission to enter. Even a simple low-level hedge or row of thorny bushes around a garden can be effective in keeping people from entering. When considering how you want to control access into an area, be sure not to forget about the

importance of surveillance. These two concepts can occasionally conflict with one another. Where possible, try to install non-opaque fencing that allows you to see through to the other side. Wrought iron and chain link fencing are great examples of this. Keep access control vegetation such thorny bushes cut below eye level so that you can clearly see through to the other side.

**Territorial Reinforcement** is the psychological impression people get of your property. We have all seen apartment communities and homes that do not look cared for. Whether it is overgrown landscaping or peeling paint, the message being sent is one of apathy and indifference. If the property owner or manager does not care, why should anyone else? Abnormal users usually take advantage of areas like these and use them for illicit activity. An example might be a public park that has been left in disrepair and where criminal activity is rampant and conducted in the open. Another common example is of the home owner or tenant who has gone on vacation. In a situation like this, you might see the curtains drawn tightly shut, newspapers piling up at the front door, mail falling out of the mailbox, and porch lights turned off. The message being sent is clear: *no one is home*.

**Target Hardening** is the traditional approach to crime prevention and security. The idea behind target hardening is to make it more difficult for **abnormal users** (criminals) to break in. You can target harden homes, sheds, and even vehicles. A few common ways to target harden a home include adding security strike plates with three-inch screws to all exterior doors and secondary locks to all windows and sliders. Secondary window locks could be inexpensive wooden dowels or window pins designed to create added security around the windows. Security film can be installed on windows making it more difficult and time consuming to break in. When considering how to target harden an area, remember that most criminals prey on opportunity. Removing opportunity (such as an open window) can significantly reduce your chances of being victimized. Burglars many times use rocks and other large objects they find in the landscaping and around the property to break windows out. Another common example is the ladder left out and unsecured. Do not make it easy for a thief to gain access to a unit by keeping your property clean and cared for.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Many of the security ideas embraced by CPTED can be added without having to spend a great deal of money. This is just a quick overview of CPTED –there is so much more to it. You can get additional information on the Internet or in the library. Also look for Timothy Crowe's book entitled, "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design."