

Parking Lot Hazards

Parking lots carry a number of inherent risks—risks that any organization that owns a lot or provides one to employees or patrons through a third party should be aware of. Slips, falls, auto accidents, theft, harassment and assaults are just some of the risks individuals face while utilizing parking lots. Thankfully, there are a number of measures property managers and employers can implement to mitigate those risks.

Design

The most important safety features of a parking lot can be implemented during the initial design phase. For instance, placing speed bumps on long straightaways can prevent drivers from accelerating to dangerous speeds.

In addition, placing concrete blocks at the front end of parking spaces can help prevent drivers from hitting obstacles, like buildings, planters or walkways. Similarly, guard rails placed around the perimeter of a parking lot can protect specific areas from collisions and help direct the flow of traffic. Parking lot safety specialists can help you determine optimal placement of these types of protective equipment.

For added pedestrian safety, consider including well-marked pedestrian crosswalks to allow patrons to safely traverse the lot. Consider marking crosswalks with signs that include bright colours and flashing lights in order to draw drivers' attention.

Overall, a strong parking lot design will encourage a pedestrian's natural surveillance—one's ability to observe and assess his or her surroundings. Ensuring that employees, patrons and the general public can easily view everything that's going on in the parking lot can

help prevent auto accidents and deter potential criminals.

To promote natural surveillance, bushes and other surrounding shrubbery should be trimmed away from the lot. Moreover, it's important to create sightlines from the parking lot to surrounding sidewalks and streets to ensure that passersby can observe incidents and react quickly.

Parking lots typically have lax security, which can make protecting employees and patrons all the more difficult.

Signage

Posting different types of signage in and around a parking lot can bolster overall safety in a variety of ways. For instance, stop signs that are strategically placed around turns or long straightaways can reduce the chances of an accident by slowing down drivers.

Appropriate signage can also help direct pedestrians to important safety items—exits and emergency phones—or away from the path of vehicles.

For lots open to the public, regulations that limit or restrict access to parking spaces may be necessary. Specifically, organizations will need to determine if their lot will be metered, and, if so, how long patrons may use the lot. Signage should reflect these regulations.

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Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important aspects of parking lot safety. This is because proper lighting practices can reduce the risk of theft, harassment and assault, as it improves visibility and eliminates potential hiding places for criminals.

Most experts suggest that areas in the lot be illuminated by at least two sources of light. When weighing lighting options, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- **Intensity.** Avoid soft lighting whenever possible. Most parking lots utilize metal halide lighting, as it is both bright and easy on the eyes.
- **Uniformity.** When lighting a parking lot, overlap areas of light. This will help ensure that there are no major shadows. For added safety, the perimeters of lots should also be illuminated.

Access Control

Another way to reduce safety incidents is to restrict access. Some parking lots utilize ticketing systems that require patrons to purchase access to parking, while others require key card access. Both of these measures can provide a paper trail that law enforcement officials can follow in the event of an incident.

Fencing placed around the perimeter of a lot can also be a particularly useful access control measure, as it reduces the potential for trespassing. There's a variety of fencing options to choose from, each with their own strengths and weaknesses:

- **Chain link:** Chain link fences are some of the most common types of fences you'll find around parking lots—and for a good reason. Chain link fences are not only cost effective, but their design promotes natural surveillance as well. On the other hand, chain link fences can be easily climbed over, making it simple for trespassers to access a lot.

- **Barbed wire:** Barbed wire fencing is most common around areas that house expensive equipment or vehicles. While they can prevent easy access, barbed wire fences have an unappealing aesthetic that can deter potential patrons.
- **Slide gates:** Slide gates, which are fairly common at storage facilities, are good for controlling both vehicle and foot traffic. This is because slide gates are often equipped with keypad or card access controls. The major downside relates to maintenance, as slide gates can be expensive to repair or replace in the event of malfunction.

Surveillance and Security Measures

For ongoing safety monitoring, active security systems are often the best option. There are 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 allows for continuous monitoring and 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 any on-site parking lot staff is trained on what to do when an incident occurs.
- **Emergency phones and intercoms.** Easy access to emergency phones and intercoms can be

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critical in the event of a safety incident. These systems are best installed in well-lit and easy-to-reach areas near 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 an often overlooked, but nonetheless important aspect of parking lot safety. When a parking lot is littered with garbage, it can appear as though no one is responsible for the area. To address these concerns, regularly inspect the facility, clean debris and remove unattended vehicles when applicable.

It's also important to stay on top of potential slip and fall hazards to help keep patrons safe. Broken or failing concrete can pose a serious tripping hazard. Inspect your lot regularly for cracks or pot holes, repairing them whenever possible.

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 lot, keep in mind the following:

- Many of the issues related to snow removal can be traced back to poor communication. Before winter hits, lot owners need to ensure that an individual or contractor has been identified and that they know it's their job to remove any snow.
- Snow should always be piled away from high-traffic areas like sidewalks, entrances and exits. That way, melting snow does not freeze where pedestrians are likely to walk.
- It's important to give snow a place to flow as it melts. As such, clearing drainage points of debris can prevent flooding or potential ice hazards.

Risk Assessments

In order to implement preventive safety and maintenance measures, many organizations have professional risk assessments done on their parking lots. Assessments can help identify major risk areas, providing organizations with strategies on how to address potential hazards. Risk assessments should be performed frequently to ensure that organizations are proactively addressing risks.

For more information on managing risks, contact Cal LeGrow Insurance Limited today.