

Shopping Mall Crime Prevention

The term “shopping mall” is used to describe a cluster of shops or stores designed and developed as one architectural unit. Shopping malls may be small, large, covered, uncovered, one or many-storied, with exposed or undercover parking.

Shopping malls are an American invention, evolving out of Main Street shopping areas. The first recognizable shopping mall was built in 1907. With the post World War II baby boom and the move to suburbs, small shopping malls were integrated into the plans for new communities. Continued growth and the proliferation of motor vehicles saw the emergence of larger malls serving mobile regional populations. Most recently, huge regional malls housing office complexes and cinemas as well as department stores, specialty shops and individual boutiques have appeared.

Types of Shopping Malls

Shopping malls fall into five major categories: neighborhood malls, community malls, regional malls, city center malls and multi-use megamalls.

- **Neighborhood Malls** – are often anchored by a supermarket and serve up to 40,000 people. Neighborhood malls are usually located on local streets.
- **Community Malls** – add a large inexpensive chain store and serve up to 150,000 people from several neighborhoods. Community malls are usually located on highway arteries.
- **Regional Malls** – usually support two main department stores and a large number of smaller specialty shops. Regional malls are often located at major highway intersections.
- **City Center Malls** – can be built underground or as a part of an urban redevelopment program.
- **Megamalls** – join hotels, cinemas, restaurants, bars, offices, sports arenas and even amusement parks with traditional shops within one vast structure (Mall of America in Minnesota and West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada).

Factors Affecting Crime in Malls

Shopping mall crime problems tend to occur in predictable patterns that depend on the following:

- The location of the mall – because they were built in middle-class affluent suburbs and were accessible only by motor vehicle, older malls tended not to attract great numbers of crime-prone groups. As demographics change and crime moves out to the suburbs from the inner city, crimes in and around shopping malls have increased.
- The design of the mall, its grounds and facilities – design is often key to property and nuisance crimes in and around shopping malls. Nuisance behavior is most frequent near high-activity spots that attract juveniles or areas where non-buyers hang out. Thefts occur more frequently in busy stores with easy access.
- **CAP Index** – The CAP Index is a private organization that can provide a crime vulnerability assessment for any location in the United States and Canada. This vulnerability assessment incorporates a wide variety of information from neighborhood

demographic and physical housing data, FBI Uniform Crime Reports, National Crime Surveys, local police data and company crime reports to provide a forecast intended to indicate the likelihood of crimes occurring in any location.

CAP Index scores are scaled so a value of 100 is equal to the national, state and county average. Thus, a CAP Index of 200 is twice the average.

In determining appropriate security measures, shopping mall management should be aware of the CAP Index score for their location. Research data indicates that 65% of shopping malls are located in areas with above average crime risks. As many as 25% of shopping malls are in areas having three times or more the national crime risk.

For more information about CAP Index and how to obtain a crime vulnerability assessment for a specific location, see their Internet website at www.capindex.com.

Crime Prevention Strategies for Shopping Malls

There are numerous crime prevention strategies that can serve to make commercial shopping malls safer and more secure. These strategies include the following:

- **Security Patrol** – Provide ample uniformed security officers to patrol both the interior and exterior of the mall in well-marked, high-profile vehicles. The security staff either contract or in-house, may be augmented by off-duty sworn police officers.
- **Escorts** – Provide escort service to both patrons and employees to their motor vehicles, particularly during late-night hours of darkness.
- **Community Policing Substation** – In some communities, community policing substations have been located in shopping malls.
- **Exterior Lighting** – Provide adequate exterior lighting (3-5 footcandles) in all parking and exterior areas associated with the shopping mall. A reliable lighting inspection and replacement program should also be in place.
- **Placement of Public Restrooms** – Unfortunately, shopping malls frequently place public restrooms at the end of long service corridors in less desirable space. Isolation makes mall restrooms possible sites for anything from robbery to sexual assault. Mall maintenance or housekeeping personnel should be instructed to be in the restrooms every 15-30 minutes, and keep log sheets showing the frequency of these visits. In addition, mall security officers should also visit the restrooms periodically. A CCTV camera may be installed to monitor the corridors leading to the public restrooms, especially if the corridors twist and turn. Convex mirrors at corridor intersections can help mall patrons see around corners before they get there.
- **Bicycle and Mounted Patrol** – For purposes of visibility and accessibility, some shopping malls have their security officers patrol the parking areas and grounds on bicycles. A small number even have horseback mounted security patrols.
- **Rooftop Patrol** – Particularly during holiday shopping periods, when theft from motor vehicles tend to increase, shopping malls may station security or police officers on the building roof with binoculars.
- **Shoplifting Awareness Training** – The shopping mall may provide or sponsor shoplifting awareness and prevention training for its tenants and their employees.
- **Exercise Walkers** – Enclosed shopping malls often attract persons who want to walk within the confines of the mall for purpose of exercise. This practice should be encouraged, particularly during hours of least activity within the mall.

- **Use of CCTV** – Closed-circuit television cameras can be used to monitor parking areas and common areas. The Mall of America employs approximately 130 CCTV cameras monitored by two persons at all times.
- **Emergency Phones or Call Boxes** – Shopping malls may provide highly visible emergency phones or call boxes located in parking areas and the mall itself.
- **Volunteer Patrol** – A few shopping malls have developed volunteer citizen patrols to assist mall security or volunteer parents to work at the shopping malls on Friday and Saturday nights to interact with youth.
- **Wayfinding Signs** – Signs should be placed along shopping mall ring roads to assist patrons in locating parking that is closest to their destination.