

# Technical Report 15

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## *Community Safety*

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## Introduction

Crime deeply affects quality of life. High crime rates mean more crime victims, with the criminal and the victim usually knowing each other. Living in a crime-prone neighborhood is associated with a higher risk of victimization.

During the Community Design Forum in September 2007, nicknames such as “felony alley” and “hazel hell” were mentioned, implying that the crime rate for the study area is unusually high. Is this reality or perception?

The Health Impact Assessment (Technical Report 9) identifies community safety perceptions as the major reason people choose not to walk, use recreational facilities, or allow their children to play outside. While many variables influence violence and crime in communities, aspects of the physical environment can both encourage and discourage street crime.

This Technical Report provides a comparative analysis of crime data in the Three Creeks Special Planning Area by neighborhood and explores the link between community safety and environmental design.

### **Crime data by Neighborhood**

Crime data for 2007 was collected and sorted by neighborhood association within the Three Creeks Special Planning Area. The same data was isolated for the Highway 99 sub-area plan boundary. Data was collected for twelve different categories of crime. A comparison between the Highway 99 planning area and 10 nearby neighborhoods shows that the Highway 99 planning area had the highest rates per 1,000 people for 4 of the 12 crime categories (Assault, Drugs, Burglary and Forgery). The NE Hazel Dell Neighborhood had the highest crime rates for 7 out of 12 crimes, with the majority of the problem focused on the area around Highway 99. Clearly, crime within portions of the Highway 99 planning area is real and a serious concern for the community.

### **Crime Prevention through Environmental Design**

*“CPTED is the proper design and effective use of the built environment which may lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement of the quality of life.” – National Crime Prevention Institute.*

CPTED, or “crime prevention through environmental design”, is the brainchild of criminologist C. Ray Jeffery, whose book with that title came out in 1971. His work was ignored throughout the 1970s, but later was combined with a more limited approach, termed “defensible space”, developed by architect Oscar Newman. Both men built on the previous work of Elizabeth Wood, Jane Jacobs and Schlomo Angel.

### **Does CPTED Really Prevent Crime?**

A more accurate term for this approach might be “Crime *Deterrence* through Environmental Design”. It is clear from almost three decades of research that offenders cannot be prevented from committing crimes with absolute certainty. CPTED relies on changes to the environment that will cause an offender to make certain behavioral decisions. Those changes are crafted to deter rather than prevent behavior. The more diverse deterrence

strategies employed, the more likely that an offender will be persuaded to change his or her plans.

### Strategies for the Built Environment

CPTED strategies rely on the ability to influence offender decisions that precede criminal acts. Research into criminal behavior shows that the decision to offend or not to offend is more influenced by cues about the perceived risk of being caught than by cues about reward or ease of entry. Consistent with this research, CPTED-based strategies emphasize enhancing the perceived risk of detection and apprehension.

CPTED is based on the theory that proper design and effective use of the built environment can reduce crime, reduce the fear of crime, and improve the quality of life. Design strategies are intended to dissuade offenders from committing crimes by manipulating the environment in which those crimes occur.

The three most common built environment strategies are *natural surveillance*, *natural access control* and *natural territorial reinforcement*. Natural surveillance and access control strategies limit the opportunity for crime. Territorial reinforcement promotes social control through a variety of measures.

**Natural surveillance** increases the threat of apprehension by taking steps to increase the perception that potential offenders can be seen. Natural surveillance occurs by designing the placement of physical features, activities and people to maximize visibility and foster positive social interaction among legitimate users of private and public space. Potential offenders feel increased scrutiny and limitations on their escape routes.

CPTED looks at the entire neighborhood to identify areas or elements that have the potential to attract crime. Applying simple CPTED design principles can lead to solutions that deter crime in these areas. CPTED does not promote the “fortressing” of properties - quite the contrary. The ability to see what is going on in and around a property should be the first priority. Perpetrators of crime are attracted to areas and residences with low visibility. This can be counteracted in the following ways:

- **Lighting** – Street lights should be well spaced and in working order, alleys and parking areas should also be lit. Lighting should also reflect the intended hours of operation, (i.e. lighting of playfields or structures in local parks may actually encourage after hour criminal activities). Motion-sensing lights perform the double duty of providing light when needed and letting trespassers know that “they have been seen.”
- **Landscaping** –Rectangular sites are safer than irregularly shaped sites because there are fewer hiding places. Plants should follow the 3-8 rule of thumb; hedges no higher than 3 feet, and tree canopies starting no lower than 8 feet. This is particularly important around entryways and windows.
- **Fencing** – Fences should allow people to see into and out of a site. Even if the fences are built for privacy, they should be of a design that is not too tall and allows some visibility.
- **Windows** – Windows that look out on streets and alleys provide good natural surveillance, especially bay windows. These should not be blocked. Retirees, stay at home parents, and people working from home offices also provide good surveillance for the neighborhood during the day.

**Natural access control** limits the opportunity for crime by taking steps to clearly differentiate between public space and private space. By selectively placing entrances and exits, fencing, lighting and landscape to limit access, natural access control occurs.

Access control refers to homes, businesses, parks and other public areas having distinct and legitimate points for entry and exits. However, this must be balanced to avoid “user entrapment,” or not allowing for safe fire exiting or police response to an area. Generally, crime perpetrators will avoid areas that only provide one way to enter and exit, have high visibility and/or have a high volume of user traffic. This can be assured by:

- Park designs with open user areas and defined entry points. A good example is a park with transparent fencing around the perimeter, and a large opening in the gate for entry. Putting vendors or shared public facilities near this entrance creates more traffic and more surveillance.
- Businesses with one public entrance, preferably not a recessed doorway.
- Public restrooms within view of centers of activity. Restrooms can become dangerous if placed in uninhabited areas of a park, down long hallways, or past a series of closed doors.
- Personal residences with front and back doors that are clearly visible and well lit.

**Territorial reinforcement** promotes social control through increased definition of space and improved proprietary concern. An environment designed to clearly delineate private space does two things. First, it creates a sense of ownership. Owners have a vested interest and are more likely to challenge intruders or report them to the police. Second, the sense of owned space creates an environment where “strangers” or “intruders” stand out and are more easily identified. By using buildings, fences, pavement, signs, lighting and landscape to express ownership and define public, semi-public and private space, natural territorial reinforcement occurs. Territorial reinforcement measures make the normal user feel safe and make the potential offender aware of a substantial risk of apprehension or scrutiny.

Much like the “Broken Window” theory, which advocates a quick response to nuisance crimes to show that a neighborhood is valued, territoriality means showing that your community “owns” your neighborhood. While this includes removing graffiti and keeping buildings and yards maintained, it also refers to small personal touches. Creating flower gardens or boxes, putting out seasonal decorations, or maintaining the plants in traffic circles seems simple, but sends a clear message that people in your neighborhood care and won’t tolerate crime in their area. These kinds of personal touches work in business communities as well.

More complex design efforts can also be undertaken for more dramatic changes. These are some things that should be considered when planning for future growth:

- Front porches and apartment balconies which add to street surveillance.
- Traffic plans that consider the size of the neighborhood. People drive by “feel” more than speed limits. A wide, two lane residential street can lead to speeding. Traffic circles and other measures can help to calm traffic.
- Institutional architecture that respects the neighborhood identity and does not dwarf the current scale of the neighborhood.
- Clear transitions between private, semi-private and public areas.

## Four obstacles to adopting CPTED

There are four primary obstacles to the adoption of CPTED.

1. A lack of knowledge of CPTED by environmental designers, land managers, and individual community members. Allocating substantial resources to community educational programs is often required.
2. Resistance to change. Many resist the type of cooperative planning that is required to use CPTED. Beyond that, skeptics reject the research and historic precedents that support the validity of CPTED concepts.
3. The perception that CPTED claims to be a panacea for crime that will be used to replace more traditional approaches rather than a small, but important, complementary tool in deterring offender behavior.
4. Many existing built areas were not designed with CPTED in mind, and modification would be expensive, politically difficult, or require significant changes in some areas of the existing built environment.

## Conclusion

State and local policing, incarceration policies, and social service initiatives are beyond the scope of this paper. However, a number of county planning and urban design approaches can help address safety concerns. Policy options include:

- Design standards that include specific design features such as porches, stoops, and strategically placed windows to put "eyes on the street" and that improve the transparency of urban environments so that passers-by can see what is going on in particular locations
- Effective lighting of streets and public spaces, as well as safety call boxes and frequent public transportation
- Well-designed buffers between the public realm and private or semi-private open space
- Aggressive code enforcement along with regulations requiring demolition of derelict structures and maintenance of vacant lots and brownfield sites
- Promoting mixed-income housing to avoid concentrating lower-income people in one place
- Support for community clean-ups
- Voluntary site inspections to suggest how CPTED strategies could be applied

Many of these initiatives rely on relatively easy, common-sense design solutions that can be integrated into the daily vocabulary of architects and planners. However, it should be stressed again that design approaches, by themselves, cannot deal with the large mass of accumulated social problems in the Highway 99 Sub-area. Additional social service, housing, education, economic development, and public safety resources are essential to deal with these issues in the long run.

## More Information

- [International CPTED Association](#)
- [Crime prevention and the built environment.](#)
- Washington State University [CPTED Annotated Bibliography](#).
- Oscar Newman, [Creating Defensible Space](#) (pdf) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 1996).
- [CPTED Crime Prevention Guide](#). CPTED Handbook for Architects and Urban Planners.
- [Law Enforcement Environmental Planning Association of California](#)
- [CPTED Training](#)

**APPENDIX A      Crime Date By Neighborhood**



