



SAFER PLACES

By G. Robert Harkins, Ed.D.

As owners, operators, and users of parking facilities, we all have in our minds several lingering questions: Is my parking facility safe? What can I do to protect myself and my customers while in my parking facility? There's a lot of advice out there on how to improve parking facility security, and it can be overwhelming. Luckily, some common sense and relatively simple actions can make a big difference in keeping our customers and employees safer on our properties.

For Customers

First, what can we tell our customers who enter our facilities to park? Consider signage or handouts for them that explain some basic safety tips.

Before You Park:

- Download one of the many numerous free parking apps that can help you mark where you left your vehicle when parking somewhere new.
- Always drive with car doors locked.
- Roll up and lock your windows.
- Do not leave valuables in sight. This includes phones, pagers, purses, wallets, etc.—things that might invite theft. Put valuables and packages in the trunk or out of sight before arriving at the parking facility.
- Do not leave your driver's license, original registration, house keys, or other important personal items in your vehicle.
- Do not store an extra key "hidden" under the car or behind the fender. Thieves are onto that.
- Note locations of emergency phones, parking attendants, and security.
- Never leave an I.D. tag on your key ring. If lost or stolen, a thief may find you, your car, or your home.

Selecting a Parking Space:

- Whenever possible, you should park next to entrances or in areas that are in the open or well-lighted.
- Do not park in isolated locations or behind obstructions that block you from the view of others.
- Consider your return time when choosing a parking location, as it may be dark when you return.
- Drivers should look for parking spots that will not crowd the vehicles next to them.
- Cars should be parked in the center of the parking space with ample room on both sides for passengers to get out.

After You Park:

- Before walking far from your car, make sure to locate all entrances and exits to the garage or lot.
- Make a note of where you parked or use the app you downloaded.
- Walk with a confident and positive attitude.
- Don't walk alone at night.
- Use an anti-theft device when possible.
- Trust your instincts. If you sense something isn't right, ask a security guard or officer for an escort to your car.
- When in doubt, report to security anything that looks or feels suspicious.
- Keep a hand free at all times. This gives you the opportunity to attempt to fend off a would-be attacker.
- Back into parking spaces where possible. This allows for a quick and easy exit.
- Avoid parking next to vans, pickups, or other large vehicles. They can hide your vehicle, making it easier to break in or for an attacker to hide.
- Always report any suspicious activities to parking attendants or security, or call the police by dialing 911. If you feel you are being followed, walk or run quickly to a lighted store or other place where crowds of people can offer help. Know where to go for help—security guard, police station, station, grocery store, etc. Do not go home if you think you're being followed.

When Returning to Your Vehicle:

- Be alert to strangers hanging around the parking area.
- Leave at the first sign of danger and call 911 or use an emergency phone in the facility.
- If possible, return to your car with an escort or in a group.
- Be aware of your surroundings and don't allow yourself to be distracted (by children, packages, cell phone, etc.).
- If you have an unlocking button or keyless entry system, unlock your driver's door only.
- Have your keys in your hand and ready before arriving at your

Questions to ask and actions to take to boost the safety and security of parking facilities.

- car. Keep a whistle on your key chain or a hand on your car alarm if available.
- When returning to your car, check all sides before entering.
- Look inside your vehicle before entering to make sure there are no unwanted occupants. Once inside the car, lock all doors and start the engine. Start moving the car as soon as possible after getting situated.
- Never offer rides to people you do not know.
- Avoid lingering. Avoid fumbling for keys or pass codes and plan to get into the vehicle and make a speedy exit. Never answer a cell phone call on the way to your car.
- If you are unable to locate your car, don't be afraid to ask a parking attendant or security guard for help—they are happy to help!
- When parking on streets, avoid desolate areas that are lightly traveled and, when possible, walk to your vehicle with others.
- If you see someone breaking into your vehicle or another vehicle, alert the police or security guards. Do not place yourself in harm's way.

For Our Facilities

As owners or operators of parking facilities, have we inspected our facilities for safety and security? Let's take a walk through our facilities with a critical eye.

What do We Know About Our Facility?

- Is the street address known to all employees?
- Are all supervisors familiar and conversant in the hours of operation and coverage?
- Do employees wear uniforms and have identification badges?

Walk the Exterior Perimeter and Ask Yourself These Questions:

- Is the perimeter clearly defined and identified?
- Is there a serviceable and fully-functional barrier?
- Is there a clear zone of at least 20 feet from material stored near the fence?
- Is the clear zone free of shrubs, underbrush, and high grass?

- Is the perimeter fence in easy view of employees and/or video surveillance?
- Is perimeter lighting functional and adequate?

Now Walk the Entire Facility and Ask Yourself These Questions:

- Are directional and guidance signs easy to read and understand?
- Are lanes and spaces well marked?
- Are payment machines easily seen and used?
- Are cashier booths and offices secure? How is money protected?
- Are safes and vaults equipped with an alarm system?
- Is there emergency power?
- Does the facility comply with local fire codes and is it inspected regularly?
- Is lighting functional and adequate?
- Are there emergency call boxes located throughout the parking lot?
- Does the facility have CCTV? Is it monitored during all hours?
- Is there CCTV on all entrance and exit points?
- Does landscaping provide a hiding place?

Ask Yourself These Questions That are Unique to Garages

- Are the elevator inspections current?
- Is it possible for either people or CCTV to see inside the elevators?
- Are stairwells clean and clear of obvious safety hazards?
- Is it possible for either people or CCTV to see inside stairs?
- How is the facility cleared of ice and snow?
- How can you make stairwells and upper levels more secure to prevent disturbed individuals from jumping?

These are some tips some for making our facilities more safe and secure for our customers, our staff members, and our communities. I encourage you to use these pages as a checklist of sorts to educate your parkers, inspect your property, consider ways to boost its security, and make relatively simple improvements that benefit everyone.



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