

Guard Duty

Don't minimize the importance of the basics like tenant screening and lighting. Plus, new technology has made intrusion alarms possible in individual units. **By Dana Enfinger**



What does your property look like at night? Adequate lighting attracts residents and repels people up to no good.

Security measures are likely to save you more than peace of mind even if no crime is ever committed on your property. Residents who feel safe at your apartment complex are less likely to move.

Apartment communities with moderate rents tend to have high turnover, according to data from the National Multi Housing Council. Many of these properties experience annual tenant turnover rates of more than 50 percent. The higher your turnover, the more it costs you—whether you are looking for new residents or addressing the wear and tear related to high turnover.

What are the best security measures to protect your properties? That depends on how big your security budget is and the specifics of each multifamily asset you may have in your portfolio.

“It’s best to remember the basics, and one of them is good resident screening,” said Patrick Conn, president of property management for the Charles Dunn Co., a real estate firm based in Los Angeles. “Outsiders should always be more of a threat than the insiders, meaning your residents.”

Crime-free lease addendums

Conn encouraged apartment owners and managers to have potential residents fill out a crime-free lease addendum, particularly if the complex

is located in an area known for criminal activity.

“This addendum would be a good idea when there may be an existing problem at a property or if the property is located in an area where there’s a high crime rate,” said Conn. “You don’t normally see this addendum used at more upscale apartment complexes.”

The addendum states that if a resident is involved in any criminal activity he or she can be evicted. This document is one facet of the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, which was first successfully developed in Mesa, Ariz., in 1992. Approximately 2,000 cities and several counties in 44 states have adopted the program, which was created to reduce crime at apartment properties.

Owners and managers may need to seek legal advice to determine how to implement stronger eviction policies at their communities.

Let there be light

Adequate lighting is another essential security measure. This means enough lighting to make sure building numbers are visible at night and allow anyone nearby to identify a possible threat from 100 feet.

Entrances to any access gates and units should have plenty of light, said Mark Szittai, senior sales executive with Network Multifamily Security Corp., a security firm based in Irving, Texas. Szittai works with market-rate and affordable multifamily clients in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.