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Times are changing for security in residential property management - by Christopher Lanni

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During my 25 years in this industry, it's been commonplace to see the subject of security placed on the back burner by property managers, owners and board members in lieu of what are perceived as more pressing property issues. When it is addressed, it's often narrowly defined as a security officer in a uniform doing security-type "things." It's also not uncommon for properties to think "bad things don't happen here" and have the misconception that they're immune to a security crisis taking place at their property.

Over the past several years, security-related incidents in residential settings have been frequently in the news and are a hot topic among industry professionals. Thefts of mail, packages and catalytic converters; drug manufacturing, distribution and abuse; along with active violence claiming lives are among the incidents we hear about. Additionally, litigation resulting from these losses, injuries and incidents are garnering attention -- all sending a clear message that there can be profound consequences, if security is not taken seriously by a property.

Due to recent media coverage, I've received numerous inquiries about security. Properties are struggling to understand what "reasonable" security measures are and how to achieve them. My recommendation is to approach security with a focus on these three components.

Use of Policy and Procedures

Operating procedures provide direction on how routine tasks will be performed and how issues will be addressed. They promote consistency in response and provide a clear expectation for all stakeholders. Examples include how visitors are allowed to access a property; how and when property checks are performed; how metal keys or key fobs are issued; and what happens when crime or suspicious activity is observed or reported on the property.

Use of Technology

Technology advancements available to properties have increased profoundly. They include higher resolution cameras with optional analytics that can be "taught" to watch for certain conditions and alert property staff; electronic access control systems that can provide real-time alerts on conditions throughout the property; and mobile access credentials that take the place of keys or key fobs and are stored on an authorized user's phone.

Actions of Individuals

All people at a property play a role in the security initiative. Examples include the resident notifying their front desk when they see suspicious activity; a staff member conducting a property check looking for hazards or unsecure doors; and a maintenance person servicing lighting fixtures and door hardware to ensure they are operating properly.

Identifying which specific measures should be in place at a property is determined by the many variables that must be examined during the security assessment process. Property location and surrounding characteristics, incident history, risk level, physical layout, demographics, and operating policies and procedures are just a few important considerations.

Properties should not work in a vacuum in assessing their security needs, as there are many resources available. Legal counsel, insurance carriers, local police, independent security consultants, professional organizations, and product representatives can all provide valuable information and insight.

When designed and executed properly, a residential security initiative will become an integral part of a property's culture and philosophy and inform every decision. Additionally, ongoing monitoring, evaluating and adjusting security measures is imperative, as circumstances and needs will definitely change over time.

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