

# ATLAS SAFETY & SECURITY DESIGN, INC.

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## Secure your Property to Avoid Liability

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Jury awards in seven figures are no rarity these days if people suffer accidents or are victimized by crime on the property of a company.

Security architectural consultant Dr. Randall Atlas, of Atlas Safety and Security Design, Inc. (Miami), suggests that you can reduce your premises liability exposure in multiple ways.

### Where to start

Various questions are considered in court during liability cases. By asking these questions now, you could prevent an accident or crime from occurring. If, however, an incident does occur, be able to show that you considered each of these areas and made improvements based on your study. Ask the following questions:

- ◆ Are all locks of sufficient quality and quantity to protect people from an unauthorized entry?
- ◆ Are systems such as the intercom, security alarm, fire alarm, and CCTV tested and inspected regularly?

- ◆ Is there even and consistent light at all parking areas, walkways, and entries?
- ◆ Is distribution of keys controlled, and are extra keys kept in a secure location?
- ◆ Is foliage trimmed to eliminate hiding places and to let natural and/or artificial light shine on the area?
- ◆ Are roof, basement, utility, and mechanical space doors secured against unauthorized entry?
- ◆ Are security bars or screens designed to allow exit in a fire ?
- ◆ Are the buildings set up in such away that persons who do not belong on the property can be easily seen ?

## Design leads to safety

"A secure property is one that takes into account all architectural and environmental factors affecting crime and accidents," Atlas says. Stairs and ramp designs, handrails, lighting, flooring, parking area design, blind spots, door and window placement, building circulation patterns, and elevators are just a few of these factors. A safety analysis must answer the following questions:

- ◆ Are there loose or swinging objects or exposed machine parts that could unexpectedly strike a person?
- ◆ Could a person be temporarily blinded by changes in lighting? Could a person be suddenly surprised by changes in floor surfaces?
- ◆ Are holes or trenches uncovered or unmarked?
- ◆ Does the overall design of the property avoid demands on reach, height, strength, balance, gait or grip?
- ◆ Is there an increased risk of injury to people wearing long sleeves, ties, scarves, high heels, loose clothing?
- ◆ Is lighting sufficient for surveillance of both the interior and exterior?
- ◆ Are ground floor windows secured?
- ◆ Do doors have secure hinges and dead bolt locks?
- ◆ Are lobbies and elevators equipped with corner mirrors?
- ◆ Are fire escape doors locked so that they prevent unauthorized entry from the outside?

## People and security

- ◆ Do guards patrol the grounds or challenge strangers?
- ◆ Do you have a good working relationship with the local police?
- ◆ Does someone in your organization keep up with advancing security technology and with the latest security-related ideas about building design?

- ◆ Do you log all incidents and keep them on file for at least the time of your jurisdiction's statute of limitations for negligence suits?
- ◆ Are all employees screened and do you perform background checks before hiring?
- ◆ Do you have clear statements for your security mission, job descriptions, shift descriptions, and essential functions?
- ◆ Do security and nonsecurity staff receive sufficient and proper training in security measures?
- ◆ Do you review, update, and document your security policies and procedures at least on an annual basis?
- ◆ Do employees receive a copy of policies and procedures and do they sign that they have reviewed them?

When a property owner can show that defects were corrected by reasonable steps, says Atlas, there may be a better chance for a strong defense in a liability case.

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