

# CRIME PREVENTION in OVERNIGHT LODGING

A guide to preventing drug activity, prostitution,  
and other illegal behavior in hotels and motels

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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitution, drug activity, and other criminal behavior can harm a hotel or motel and damage the surrounding community. The information in this booklet will give you, the innkeeper, tools to help prevent illegal activity from occurring on your premises.

Not all information provided will be appropriate for every lodging situation. What works for a twenty-room motel near a residential neighborhood may not be appropriate for a 200-room hotel in a downtown business district. Every innkeeper is encouraged to review *all* the material, then implement those approaches that could work at your establishment.

### DRUG ACTIVITY, PROSTITUTION, AND THE LAW

In most states, if you allow your property to be used for prostitution, drug dealing, drug manufacturing, or other criminal activity, you risk financial judgments, the possibility of having the property closed, and in some cases, even forfeiture of the property. While the applicable laws vary by state, the relevant facts are consistent: property owners and operators are not permitted to allow chronic criminal behavior to persist for long on their property without facing increasing risk of severe penalties.

### WHY PREVENTION WORKS

If you allow guests involved in illegal activity to rent your rooms, your property becomes more attractive to those who cause problems. As problem guests become regulars, good guests become scarce. The longer the cycle continues, the more expensive it is to stop. As the problem worsens, you may face the choice of turning away guests you depend on or facing expensive court costs and civil penalties. Innkeepers who practice effective crime prevention and work hard to attract good clientele experience just the opposite —

as problem guests become scarce, desirable guests check in more often, vacancy rates go down, and profits go up. For these reasons prevention steps are both easier to carry out, and less expensive, than the steps required for crisis control.

## FIRST STEP: COMMITMENT

While crime prevention techniques can be taught, the commitment to *use* them cannot. For some, applying suggestions from this booklet will come naturally. For others, there may be difficulty learning new habits. A few may even be reluctant to use the techniques out of a belief that without accepting *some* "bad" guests the business could not operate. However, experience has shown that even one bad guest can repel many good ones. Commitment pays off: any lodging that can survive with "bad" guests can thrive once improvements are made, over time attracting good clientele and prospering financially.

While each of the ideas in this booklet can help, the most consistent factor in determining the effectiveness of any approach is your commitment to succeed. The key is in making the commitment to use the tools, and then assuring that all employees are ready to help carry them out.

Many of the following steps make good sense for any establishment, while some may be appropriate for only those establishments with a history of problems. Nevertheless, don't be afraid to take the steps you need to protect your property — if you do it in an accommodating manner, only dishonest people should object.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

The physical appearance of your hotel or motel can make a big difference to your ability to prevent illegal activity. Many of the elements that make your business

attractive to desirable guests will also discourage problem guests. In general, any steps that show you care about the premises and watch for trouble will help.

## VISIBILITY AND ACCESS

Let troublemakers know they will be seen:

► **Install outdoor lighting and remove "hiding places."** If you are planning to make only one environmental change, make this one. Problem behavior is more likely to occur in areas that are dark or dimly lit or where opportunities to hide are plentiful. Brighten up parking lots, sidewalks, hallways, and alleys. Keep bushes and shrubs trimmed. For fencing, use wrought iron, "Cyclone" or other see-through barriers.

► **Control traffic flow and access.** If you are having a problem controlling access to the grounds around the building, consider blocking some parking exits, adding fencing, and rerouting traffic so all automobile *and* foot traffic — coming and going — must pass within view of the office.

If more control is needed, issue parking permits to guests and registered visitors, dated for the length of stay. Post signs forbidding cars without permits to use the motel lot and be consistent in having violators towed away. Remember, it is *your* parking lot, not a public one.

► **Control and monitor building entrances.** The fewer the building entrances, the easier they are to monitor. If your building has public hallways and common areas, channel guests through the fewest entry points possible. For required fire exits, make them "exit only" doors and consider converting them to alarm doors, suitable for emergency use only. Ideally, the entrances that remain should be visible from the office, or monitored by closed circuit TV as described in the following paragraph.

► **Install a video-monitoring system that, at minimum, covers the registration area.** A monitoring system provides a video record if an incident should occur. It also acts as a deterrent — people contemplating illegal activity are less likely to use your premises if they know you have their picture. In addition, some innkeepers use video monitoring to look at potential guests *before* meeting them in the registration area — allowing time to observe obvious warning signs prior to discussing registration. Some add a sign near the monitor that states: "For your protection and ours, guest registrations may be videotaped."

Although video monitoring can be used to cover many parts of the property, at minimum monitor the registration desk and outdoor traffic passing by the office. If you have problem areas that are not monitored, have employees check them as often as every 15 minutes during hours when activity has typically occurred.

While some large-scale monitoring installations can be expensive, there are many systems appropriate for the needs and price ranges of smaller businesses. Some systems you can even install yourself. Aggressive shopping — comparing products and prices — should get you the system you want.

## APPEARANCE AND MAINTENANCE

A building that looks cared for will not only attract good customers — it will also *discourage* many who are involved in illegal activity. Any changes that help communicate "safe, quiet, & clean" may further protect the premises.

► **Keep the exterior looking clean and fresh.** Add a new coat of paint, keep garden strips well tended, and pick up litter regularly.

► **Maintain the rooms.** Assure that guest rooms appear clean and well maintained.

Poor maintenance of rooms will not only harm repeat business from good customers, it will also tell bad customers that standards are low.

▶ **Remove graffiti.** Graffiti may be the random work of a juvenile delinquent, or the work of a gang member marking territory. Regardless, it serves as an invitation for more problems. If you believe graffiti may be gang related, call your local police department and discuss the issue. Take a picture of it. Then remove it or paint it over immediately. Remove it again if it reappears – do not let it become an eyesore.

▶ **Repair vandalism.** As with graffiti, an important part of discouraging vandalism is to repair the problem fast. If the vandalism appears directed against you personally, advise police immediately and discuss additional approaches to addressing the situation.

## ADVERTISING

Marketing themes can enhance, or undermine, the lodging's appeal. Evaluating the way you advertise the lodging is every bit as important as evaluating your standards for monitoring, access control, appearance, and maintenance. A motel may suffer from too few good customers because its advertising message is not effective, because the message is weak compared to the competition's, or even because the message is *attractive* to those involved in illegal activity. Just as every aspect of your business's appearance should communicate "clean, safe, and comfortable," so should your advertising.

## WARNING SIGNS

As you review the following list, keep in mind that many items are *not* significant unless seen in conjunction with others.

## AT REGISTRATION

- ▶ Registrants who park their vehicles well away from the office area. If you are suspicious, request that they pull the car around so you can verify the plate number.
- ▶ Guests who list a local address at registration, yet indicate a desire to stay for many days.
- ▶ Guests who give a post office box as their street address. Note that this applies more to urban addresses than to rural locations – in some rural areas a post office box is the only address of the residence.
- ▶ Incomplete or unreadable information provided on the registration card, such as insubstantial address or illegible writing.
- ▶ Lack of picture I.D. and/or stories about lost I.D. Also, one member of a couple may show I.D., while the other refuses.
- ▶ Guests who arrive in a car but can't produce a driver's license.
- ▶ Inconsistencies between I.D. and registration information, such as different dates of birth or home addresses.
- ▶ Requests for specific units, particularly ones that are out of the way or difficult to see from the office.
- ▶ A willingness to pay for multiple nights in advance, particularly in cash.
- ▶ Evidence of large amounts of cash.
- ▶ Guests moving a large number of items into the room – particularly large trunks or other bulky containers. Or guests moving no luggage at all into the room.
- ▶ Physical and/or behavioral signs that indicate significant intoxication or drug influence.

## AFTER CHECK-IN

- ▶ High visitor traffic – cars and pedestrians stopping for brief periods. May indicate a drug dealing operation.

- ▶ A steady pattern of male visitors who stay for a short while. May indicate prostitution.
- ▶ Many phone calls – incoming or outgoing – particularly if late at night.
- ▶ Refusal of maid service, or requests to cancel service for the duration of the visit.
- ▶ Consistent requests for room service to be left outside the door, rather than brought into the room.
- ▶ Guests who check in and stay for only a few hours.
- ▶ Visitors who are not familiar with the guest they are visiting. For example, they may know a guest's first name but not last.
- ▶ Visitors bringing "valuables" into the room – televisions, VCRs, cameras – and leaving empty-handed.
- ▶ Odd car behavior – visitors parking a few blocks away and walking up, visitors sitting in the car for a while after leaving or leaving one person in the car while the other visits.
- ▶ "Lookouts" who hang out near the room during heavy traffic hours.
- ▶ Extra efforts made to cover windows or reinforce room doors.
- ▶ Makeshift alarms installed on room doors.
- ▶ Quantities of balloons or small "Ziplock" plastic bags – the type that jewelry beads are sometimes kept in.
- ▶ Sophisticated weighing scales – accurate to gram weights and smaller.
- ▶ Firearms, particularly assault weapons and those that have been modified for concealment, such as sawed-off shotguns. If weapons are being shown under suspicious circumstances, call 911 immediately and describe the situation and people involved.
- ▶ Various obvious signs such as exchanges of small packets for cash, known prostitutes

or pimps visiting guest rooms, people using drugs while sitting in their cars, syringes and other drug paraphernalia lying about.

## ABOUT CLANDESTINE DRUG LABS

While drug dealing and prostitution are the most common type of criminal activity in lodging property, methamphetamine labs are the most dangerous. Meth "cooks" can set up an operation and manufacture the drug in as little as 12 hours. Because of the privacy that motel and hotel rooms offer, some cooks prefer them for making their product. In addition to the warning signs described in the previous section, watch for:

- ▶ Vans or pickups loaded with trunks, chemical containers, or basic chemistry paraphernalia - glassware, rubber tubing, heating mantles, and other items.
- ▶ Many empty bottles or packages of over-the-counter ephedrine-based cold or hay fever medicines.
- ▶ Pieces of broken apart lithium batteries.
- ▶ A strong cat urine/ammonia smell, or a sweet, heavy perfume smell – may indicate usage of the amalgam process for methamphetamine production, a once popular process that has fallen out of favor among many "cooks" because of the complexity and associated smell.
- ▶ Water running in bathrooms or kitchen facilities for long periods.
- ▶ The odor of ether, chloroform, or other chemicals not typically associated with a guest room.
- ▶ The presence of flasks, beakers, and rubber tubing consistent with high school chemistry classes.

► Garbage containing broken flasks, beakers, tubing or other chemical paraphernalia.

If you believe a room has been used as a lab, *stay out of it* and contact local law enforcement and the Hazardous Materials team of your local fire department. If you enter a lab site, resist temptations to touch, smell, or investigate in any way. Leave immediately. Wash your face and hands, then shower off as soon as possible. If you are suffering ill health effects, contact your doctor, an emergency room, or a poison control center.

## HOUSE RULES

Innkeepers who have had difficulty with illegal activity have reduced the problem by enforcing rules similar to those listed below. Some restrictions are not appropriate for every lodging — for example, some innkeepers will not need to implement the visitor registration requirement, while others will rarely use a weekly guest policy. Select those rules that fit your approach and level of need, tailor them to your establishment, add checkout guidelines and other policies, and have them reviewed by legal counsel if necessary. Once you select your rules, post them clearly in the office *and* in every room.

Note: if you are going to use the visitor registration rule, you will need a visitor sign-in process that includes showing photo I.D. to the manager. Then, if guests have unregistered visitors, inform them of the broken rule and, depending on the severity of the problem, require that the visitor leave or that the guest check out. Generally, people involved in illegal activity would rather leave than speak with a police officer. If the problem happens soon after guests move in, you might offer their money back. By returning payment, you remove a significant argument for holding onto the room. Of course, if criminal activity is

apparent, or if you are concerned for your safety, contact the police and ask for help.

### HOUSE RULES

*To our valued guests:* To assure your peace and safety, we have the following policies. Your participation is appreciated - it helps assure a safe and restful stay for everyone.

1. For your safety and protection, **all guests and their visitors must register** before entering the premises. Unregistered visitors are subject to prosecution for trespassing.
2. At registration, each guest is required to show a driver's license or other government-issued photo I.D. and one other piece of I.D. with your name on it.
3. We will need to verify your license plate number, so please park near the registration area when signing in.
4. Only cars that have been registered may be parked in the lot. A parking permit will be issued along with your room key. Please display it on the dashboard. Cars without permits will be towed at the owner's expense.
5. No visitors are permitted after [time]. [e.g. *set a cut-off at some point between 10:00 p.m. and midnight.*]
6. We reserve the right to verify information provided at registration and require immediate checkout if false information is provided.
7. Illegal activity of any kind will not be tolerated and will be reported immediately to the police. We also reserve the right to allow local law enforcement access, upon request, to registration records and/or lists of visitors to each room.
8. **Regarding long term guests:** The option to rent weekly is available. Additional regulations apply. Copies of our weekly rental criteria and rental agreements are available on request (*or "are posted elsewhere in the office."*) If you would like to stay with us as a weekly guest, please inform us promptly so we can prepare and process your application.

## REGISTRATION

Once you set your policy for registration, *follow it*. Some suggestions may seem difficult or awkward to carry out. With practice the process will become second nature.

► **Use an "interview" format.** Instead of having the guest fill out the paperwork, ask the questions and fill in the answers yourself. This will allow the manager to notice discrepancies more easily (such as difficulty remembering a middle name, or a date of birth). Once the manager fills in responses for all questions on the form, have the guest review the information and sign it.

► **Ask for two pieces of I.D. from each adult.** Make sure that you see at least one *photo* I.D. per adult. Examples include: driver's license, military I.D., state-issued I.D., passport, or "green card." The second piece of I.D. could be a credit card, a social security card, or another commonly carried type of identification. Take a moment to look at the photo and see if it matches the person. Check the address and see if it matches the information on the registration form. When the guest signs the registration form, see if the signatures match.

The innkeeper, not the guest, should record the driver's license or other I.D. numbers onto the registration form. The registration form should have a place for the manager to initial, showing the type of I.D. and that the I.D. has been checked.

If there have been significant problems with illegal activity, keep photocopies of all I.D. with the registration card. Also, attach a business card, if the guest has one.

► **Ask how many people will be staying in the room.** Record that information on the registration form. With the information recorded, you will be in a better position to show that a rule has been broken if the guest moves in another individual.

► **Visually check, and then record, license plate numbers of guest vehicles.** If the vehicle is parked well away from the office area, ask the guest to pull the car around so you can verify the license and make of car.

► **Ask guests if they are expecting visitors.** If yes, explain the visitor rules you have set.

► **Watch for "warning signs."** Some indicators of illegal activity are listed in the section on *Warning Signs*. If such signs are present:

- Take particular care to communicate your house rules.
- Assign highly visible rooms to suspicious people.
- If you suspect they have brought an illegal guest, watch as they move in.
- If you observe clear signs of criminal intent, refuse service.

► **Use a comprehensive application form.** At minimum, application forms should include:

- Full name, home address, and date of birth, verified by I.D.
- Names of all other people planning to occupy the room also verified by I.D.
- Home phone.
- Driver's license or other photo I.D. number.
- Name, address, and phone number of employer, if any. Verify with business card, if possible.
- Name and phone of a person to call in case of emergency.

Above the signature line, language should indicate that the undersigned has reviewed the information on the form, vouches for its accuracy, understands that providing false information is grounds for immediate checkout and, if not willing to leave, arrest

for trespassing. Wording should grant permission to verify the information through consumer reporting agencies in those cases where the registrant is applying for weekly rental.

### "YES, BUT CAN I TURN THEM DOWN?"

Lodging operators are sometimes confused over how much right they have to turn down guests. A few even believe that civil rights laws require them to accept *anyone* who registers. This is not the case.

Nationally, it is illegal to discriminate in housing on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, familial status (children), or handicap. While Federal law on public accommodations (which includes lodging) does not specify as many protected classes, state and local laws regulating public accommodations often include all of the Federal Fair Housing classes as well as additional classes (age, marital status, and source of income, being common examples).

The sole purpose of these civil rights laws is to prevent discrimination on the basis of a person's membership in a protected class. Nothing in the law forbids you from taking action when your house rules are broken or signs of clear criminal intent are apparent. If circumstances require you to turn down a guest, *do* it. Then, for your own protection, keep a record of the reasons why the action was necessary.

The key is to begin with fair rules and then apply them equally to all people, regardless of the classes listed above. If your rules are fair and you apply them consistently, your procedure will be appropriate. For example, you may have a rule that requires all guests to show photo I.D. at registration, and you may refuse service to those who do not. The practice becomes illegal when you apply the rule inconsistently - requiring photo I.D. from one class but not from another.

By setting fair guidelines and applying them equally to everyone, you can retain full and appropriate control over who stays at your establishment and who does not.

For additional information about civil rights laws in your area, contact your local human rights commission.

## WEEKLY "GUESTS" AND "TENANTS"

An important part of managing overnight lodging is recognizing when one's role as "innkeeper" crosses over into a role as "landlord." This is important because long-term guests may change from "transient occupants" (lodging guests) to "tenants" (renters) protected by the rights defined in local landlord/tenant law. In general, a "transient occupant" who refuses to leave after not paying or after breaking another significant rule may be removed, as a trespasser, directly by police. However, a "tenant" who does the same thing may be removed only through the longer process of eviction.

The legal definition for when a lodging "guest" becomes a rental "tenant" varies from state to state. It is therefore important for innkeepers to set and enforce rules relating to this issue that are consistent with local law. Therefore, the following section should be reviewed as the general guideline that it is intended to be and not as the optimal approach for a particular jurisdiction.

In general, lodging guests who rent by the week are the most likely occupants to cross the line into tenancy — whether the fact of renting by the week renders the guest a "tenant" immediately or does so only after the person has stayed at the premises for some specified time period. If such is the case in your area, then registration of weekly

guests should include additional steps over those taken for the short-term, nightly guests.

## APPLICATION FOR TENANCY

For those guests who wish to become tenants, a more complete rental application should be used. *In addition* to the registration steps described above:

- ▶ At minimum:
  - Take a complete application for each adult (18 or older).
  - Record date of birth and record Social Security numbers, or if not a U.S. Citizen, numbers from other official documentation, such as a "green" card, driver's license, or passport.
  - Attach a photocopy of the I.D. to the record of each applicant.
- ▶ If you desire, you may screen week-to-week applicants much the way landlords do for month-to-month rentals. Include the following steps:
  - Record name, address, and phone number of past two landlords.
  - Find out about income/employment history for the past six months – both amount and source. Get address, phone number, and name of supervisors or other officials for verification. If self-employed, ask for proof, such as client references, or even tax returns or bank records.
  - Record bank, credit, and loan references, if any.

Once you have collected the above information, run a simple credit check, contact previous landlords, and verify income. For weekly rentals, the primary purpose of the credit check is to find out quickly if the name matches the social security number, home address, and date of birth. In addition, you could also choose to turn down applicants with severe credit

problems. After you run the credit report, attach it to the record as well. For a complete review of recommended screening steps for tenants, see the National Landlord Training Program manual, available through many local Police Departments, as well as on line at [www.cdri.com](http://www.cdri.com).

## RENTAL AGREEMENTS

As the previous section describes, there are instances when "long term guests" become your "weekly tenants," and you are effectively a landlord, not an innkeeper. For landlord/tenant situations, a written rental agreement can be an effective tool to protect the rights of both parties.

There are a variety of other provisions that an effective weekly rental agreement could have as well. Many can be taken directly from standard monthly agreements – for example you might add prohibitions against subleasing and clarify that only those on the rental agreement may occupy the unit (a lease condition that is legal in most states, New York being a notable exception.) Innkeepers should consult with their attorneys to develop rental agreements appropriate to their needs.

For more information on landlord-tenant issues, contact a local property management association, or contact your local police department and find out if they are offering the *Landlord Training Program: Keeping Illegal Activity out of Rental Property*.

## WORKING WITH POLICE

Ideally, managers who pursue the recommendations of the preceding sections will rarely need to take more severe action. But for lodging that is used frequently by guests involved in illegal activity, you will need to take additional steps. If you need police assistance, keep in mind:

- ▶ **The earlier the better.** Never hesitate to call police if you are suspicious about someone or something. Ask for a patrol car to come by so you can speak with an officer about it.
- ▶ **Become familiar with officers who work your area.** A one-on-one relationship with a district officer goes a long way to assure effective information sharing.
- ▶ **If problems accelerate, ask for more help.** Your local police department may have a number of approaches for working with innkeepers to stop chronic criminal activity, including development of problem-solving agreements to address chronic crime issues. Such partnerships often include agreements signed by both the police and the innkeeper to ensure thorough preventive measures (such as those described earlier), more rapid use of trespassing laws, and effective intervention if illegal activity occurs. Such agreements are typically a two-way street — both you and the police will commit to taking additional steps.

## TRESPASS ARRESTS

In order to maintain control over problem behavior at your property, there may be times when you need to exclude a visitor from the premises. Police officers may assist in escorting unwelcome guests or visitors off the premises and can make arrests for trespassing if the person refuses to leave or returns after having been asked to leave. If you ask the police to arrest for trespass, follow through with a criminal complaint:

- ▶ **Call your local prosecuting attorney's office the next day to determine if a complaint needs to be signed.** This is an important follow-up step that few managers take. In some cases, without a signed complaint, charges will be dropped. By following through, you assure that a citation against the problem guest will lead to a court date — and a warrant if they don't appear.

- ▶ **Show up to the court date.** Again, speak with the prosecuting attorney to verify the process. In some cases, if you don't show up, charges will be dropped. If you do show up, while it's unlikely offenders will spend time in jail, the act of putting them through the court process may deter future problems.

- ▶ **Document the incident.** Whether an incident requires police help or not, keep an "incident log" of any problem behavior. The log can be valuable for working with the police and neighbors — it is easier to agree on the scope of a problem if details are recorded.

## ABOUT RETALIATION

Some managers hesitate to enforce their rules with problem customers because they fear retaliation. Suggested precautions:

- ▶ **Post rules clearly.** If you can point out that the broken rule was plainly posted, the violator will be less likely to blame you personally for taking action.
- ▶ **Enforce rules early and consistently.** Operators who are seen as enforcing the same standards with everyone are less likely to provoke individual resentment. In addition, enforce the rule as soon as you see the infraction, rather than letting the problem escalate.
- ▶ **"Blame" the regulations.** Gain additional safety by representing enforcement actions as necessary to meet lodging requirements or law enforcement guidelines. Patrons who see you as compelled by others to act will be less likely to blame you personally.
- ▶ **If force is needed, let the police handle it.** If a problem guest won't leave, back off and call police. Don't attempt a physical confrontation yourself.

