



GUIDE TO CRIME PREVENTION IN OVERNIGHT LODGING

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 business owner and/or manager, 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 business owner is encouraged to review all the material, and then implement those approaches that could work at your establishment.

Drug Activity, Prostitution, and the Law

Knowingly renting, leasing, or making available for use your property for the purpose of unlawfully manufacturing, delivering, selling, storing or giving away any controlled substance, legend drug, or imitation controlled substance could subject you to criminal penalties. In some circumstances, your property could also be subject to seizure and potential forfeiture through application of the relevant civil asset forfeiture process. Additionally, allowing criminal conduct to occur could subject you to the City of Tacoma's Chronic Nuisance Code under Tacoma Municipal Code Chapter 8.30A, which carries with it requirements for abating the nuisance and potential criminal and civil penalties and costs.

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, civil penalties and business closure. Business owners 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.



Commitment: The First Step

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 "problem 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, do not 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.

Property

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 "Cyclone" or other see-through barriers.
- **Control traffic flow and access.** If you are having problems 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 entrances your building has, 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. Report graffiti to the Tacoma Police Department by filing a report online or by calling (253) 798-4721. Take a picture of the graffiti and 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 the 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.

House Rules and Registration Guidelines



House Rules

Motel/Hotel owners 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 owners 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 should have 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 end up speaking 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, call 911 .

[SAMPLE] House Rules (Copy and post in your establishment)

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** at the office before entering the premises. Unregistered visitors may be subject to prosecution for trespassing.
2. At registration, each guest is required to show one piece of photo I.D.
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)**. **[Managers who use a visitor limit generally 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.
8. Regarding long term guests: The option to rent weekly is available. Additional regulations apply.

Registration Guidelines

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.

A copy of at least one photo I.D. per adult (registrant and guest) is required per Tacoma Municipal Code 6B.140 Transient Accommodations to be maintained by the hotel owner.

Examples include: driver's license, military I.D., state-issued I.D., passport, or other residency or citizenship documents. 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 manager, 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 and copied.

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 activity, 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, recognizes that the hotel/motel is not their residence, understands that further application is required to become a tenant or to stay past a set number of days, understands that providing false information is grounds for immediate checkout and, if not willing to leave, arrest for trespassing.

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.

In Tacoma, it is illegal to discriminate in housing, employment, or public accommodations on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, familial status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or disability. In addition, it is illegal to discriminate based on source of income as it relates to housing. Nothing in the law forbids you from taking action when your reasonable house rules are broken or signs of clear criminal activity 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 likely 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 contact Tacoma's Office of Equity and Human Rights Department at (253) 591-5045.



Weekly Guests Application for Tenancy

Registration of weekly guests should include additional steps over those taken for the short-term, nightly guests. This is important because long-term guests may change from "transient occupants" (lodging guests) to "tenants" (renters) protected by the rights of the City's Rental Housing code (Tacoma Municipal Code Chapter 1.95). A "transient occupant" who refuses to leave after not paying or breaking another significant rule may be removed by arrest for trespassing. However, a "tenant" who does the same thing may be removed only through the longer process of eviction (frequently for nonpayment of rent).

More resources for landlords can be found by calling the Rental Housing Association of Washington at 1-800-335-2990. For information about the City's Landlord Training Program, contact Tacoma's Office of Equity and Human Rights Department at (253) 591-5045.

Warning Signs and Working with Police



Warning Signs

Keep in mind when reviewing this list 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. In addition, one member of a couple may show I.D., while the other refuses. **Remember a copy of the person who registers and guest's picture I.D. is required per Tacoma Municipal Code 6B.140 Transient Accommodations to be maintained by the hotel owner.**
- Guests who arrive in a car but who are unable or unwilling to 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 Move-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 cleaning 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, 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 "Ziploc" plastic bags - the type that jewelry beads are sometimes kept in.
- Sophisticated weighing scales - accurate to gram weights and smaller.
- If firearms or other weapons are being shown or used 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 may be a 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.
- A strong cat urine/ammonia smell, or a sweet, heavy perfume smell - may indicate usage of the amalgam process for methamphetamine production.
- 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 or the Washington State Department of Health Anonymous Meth Hotline 1-888-609-6384.
- If you enter a lab site, resist temptations to touch, smell, or investigate in any way. Leave immediately. Wash your face and hands, and 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.

If your property is used as a lab, you will need to contact the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department and arrange for a certified decontamination of the unit before renting the room again. For more information about meth labs in overnight lodging, visit doh.wa.gov/druglabs.

Working with the Police

Ideally, managers who pursue the recommendations of the preceding sections will rarely need to take more severe action. However, 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 the police if you are suspicious about someone or something. Contact the TPD Community Liaison Officer (CLO) in your area or ask for a patrol car to come by so you can speak with an officer about it. Keep in mind that if you feel threatened or witness some criminal activity, call 911. To report an emergency or any crime-in progress, call or text 9-1-1. For non-emergency situations, contact the non-emergency number at (253) 798-4721 (#1) when in Pierce County.
- **Become familiar with officers who work your area.** A one-on-one relationship with the CLOs goes a long way to assure effective information sharing.

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. To do that ask your CLO for a trespass form.

If you ask the police to arrest for trespass, follow through by filing a police report:

- **Stay in Contact with the relevant Prosecutor's Office.** In Pierce County, contact either the **Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office** or the **Office of the City Attorney in the City of Tacoma.**

If the prosecutor files a criminal case, cooperation by witnesses and victims is often critical to a successful prosecution. Staying in contact with the prosecutor's office will also help assure you are apprised of the status of the criminal case and assists the prosecution in assuring your contact information is up to date.

- **Show up to the court date.** Again, speak with the prosecutor's office to verify the process. In some cases, if you do not appear when required to do so, charges could be dropped. Discuss with the prosecutor what additional steps you could take to assist in the process.
- **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. Maintain a list of people who have been barred from the property. Make sure all employees understand which people are barred.

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 will not leave, call the police. Do not attempt a physical confrontation yourself.

This document is provided for informational purposes and to assist business owners in the community. It is not meant to convey any legal advice or services and should not be interpreted as such. Business owners are encouraged to seek the assistance of an attorney to answer questions or provide legal services. You may contact the City of Tacoma for the provision of other professional, municipal services.



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Note: This Information Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations. The business owner is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5252 .