Reducing the Fear Factor
Guidance for addressing fear of crime and insecurity within urban development

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Reducing the Fear Factor
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1.0 Fear of crime and insecurity

The literature on ‘fear of crime’ comprises two major concepts:

- **Risk perception** – Perceived risk of becoming a victim of a particular type of crime. This is measured in victim surveys that ask respondents how likely they think it is that they will be burgled (or robbed, etc) in the coming year.

- **Fear of crime** – Perceived vulnerability to street crime in relation to the urban environment. This is measured by the question ‘How safe do you feel walking alone in your area after dark? Do you feel very safe, fairly safe, a bit unsafe or very unsafe?’

While people are often aware of the risks of being a victim of crime, fear of crime in the urban environment relates less to actual risk. Typically, women and older people emerge as the most fearful in terms of ‘street safety’, despite a lower risk of actual victimisation. This may be due to a range of factors —such as fear of the consequences of an attack and anxiety about a greater range of mishaps (e.g. accidents as well as crime).

The concept of ‘fear of crime’ is therefore rather narrow, in that if focuses mainly on feelings experienced when walking alone after dark, and we therefore propose that it is better to use the term ‘feelings of insecurity’.

1.1 The causes of feelings of insecurity

There are three factors that affect an individual's feelings of insecurity: cultural, individual and situational contexts.

1. **The socio-cultural context** – The country where an individual is from and its culture can influence feelings of insecurity. There are significant differences between countries in terms of perception of risk and fear of crime in the urban environment. The International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) shows the percentage of the European population that feels unsafe on the streets after dark. Residents of Greece, Luxembourg and Italy expressed the highest level of fear of crime.
Figure 1. Percentage of the population feeling unsafe on the street after dark


2. Individual factors – Feelings of insecurity and the types of crime that a person fears differ significantly depending on a range of personal factors, including:
   - Gender, age and ethnicity
   - Vulnerability
   - Victimization (direct/indirect)
   - Lifestyle
   - Media

Women, older people, disabled and vulnerable people are more likely to feel insecure. They fear for their personal safety and are afraid of street violence—especially sexual assault. It is far more terrifying to be confronted with crimes like rape that threaten a person’s integrity and dignity, than with the loss of material goods. Consequently, women usually express greater fear of crime than men. People’s lifestyles and their experience of crime also affect feelings of insecurity. Being a victim of crime, witnessing a crime or viewing crimes on the television can all heighten fear of crime.

3. Situational context – Feelings of insecurity are affected by the nature of the urban environment, including
   - The socio-economic features of a neighbourhood
   - The style of architecture and urban layout
   - The level of maintenance
   - Visibility and clarity of space
People tend to feel insecure in run-down neighbourhoods, which show sign of incivilities in the form of graffiti, vandalism and litter. Fear of crime is heightened if a person is lost and cannot find their way around an environment. Areas where a person is isolated from the visibility of other people (e.g. residents, shop owners) increase feelings of insecurity. The visible presence of others provides feelings of security that someone might intervene in the event a potential offender targets the person.

Feelings of insecurity in the environment may or may not directly correlate with actual crime occurrence in that area. Studies of public spaces where sexual assaults have occurred show that the type and characteristics of ‘fear inducing places’, for example poor lighting and hiding places, may correlate with the occurrence of crime. However, frightening or fearful places are not necessarily places where actual crimes occur.

Feelings of insecurity do nevertheless influence the way people behave with regard to public spaces. Women, older people and vulnerable people are particularly likely to use ‘avoidance strategies’ that keep them away from problematic spaces and situations—regardless of whether crime occurs in these places or not. They tend to restrict their own and also their children's activities because of feelings of insecurity. Such behaviour impacts on the vitality and community spirit of neighborhoods, potentially contributing to economic and social decline.

The impact of the situational context on feelings of insecurity is of particular interest because it can be more easily influenced than the other two factors. It is therefore useful to understand the situational factors that impact on feelings of insecurity.

2.0 Situational factors affecting insecurity

Based on a review of the literature, ten variables have been identified that impact on feelings of insecurity in the urban environment. These factors are changeable and can be influenced by planners, design professionals, developers, policy makers, and local authorities. They are therefore referred to as the ten design determinants.

2.1 The Ten Design determinants

The design determinants are as follows:

1. **Socio-economic features of an area** – Feeling of security are greater in more affluent areas. Indicators of affluence include people, houses, public space, shops and cars

2. **Building function** – Feelings of insecurity may be generated by buildings with certain types of function, including pubs, bars and discos, as well as homeless shelters and services for drug addicts

3. **Ownership** – Clearly defined private and public space would tend to make people feel more secure. Indicators for privatised space involve real (e.g. gates) or symbolic barriers (e.g. flowerpots.)

4. **Visibility/surveillance** – The more visibility, the greater potential feelings of security. Whether people can be surveyed depends upon the length and width of sight lines

5. **Lighting** – People feel more secure with good lighting. The quality of the lighting depends upon the presence of natural light (i.e. whether it is day or night) and nature of artificial lighting in terms of lumen/flux

6. **Escape routes for a potential victim** – the presence of escape routes makes people feel more secure, if confronted by a threatening situation

7. **Attractiveness and maintenance** – People feel more secure when an environment is better maintained, i.e. it is cleaner and suffers less from litter, graffiti, etc

8. **Presence of others who are perceived as different or threatening** – Certain types of people may generate fear amongst users of urban environment (e.g. drunk people, homeless people, groups of adolescents).
9. **Formal guardians** – The presence of formal guardians such as the police and security staff often makes people feel more secure, as they are perceived as preventing crime or providing help in the event of a problem.

10. **Informal guardians** – People also feel more secure when informal guardians are present, such as residents and passers by, as it is often believed that a crime would be less likely to occur and/or that help would be forthcoming in the event of a problem.

### 2.2 Types of areas

Each determinant plays a different role depending on the environment. For example, large groups of young people might be considered frightening in a residential neighbourhood, but not if standing next to a school or youth facility. Eight types of environments are identified:

- Residential areas
- Schools and youth facilities
- Commercial and industrial areas and offices
- Shopping/retail areas
- Parks and public gardens
- Leisure centres and sports grounds
- Public transport, stations, bus stops and parking facilities (including garages)
- City/town centers and public space

This guidance focuses on how the design and planning of residential areas can reduce feelings of crime and insecurity.

### 3.0 Guidance for the design of residential areas

1. **Socio-economic features of an area**

People feel more secure in areas that appear more affluent. Signs of affluence include well-dressed people, well-kept houses with gardens and expensive cars. Clearly, residential areas must be designed and developed for people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Housing for people on lower incomes should be carefully designed and integrated with more housing for more affluent people. Styles of housing that have come to be associated with deprived communities and social decline should be avoided—e.g. high-rise dwellings.

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Combine low and high income housing
Choose the ratio of high to low income housing carefully. This will involve deciding whether to have a block or building of ‘the same kind’, or perhaps a mix of some sort.
Combine high rise with lower dwellings to gain a ‘human scale’
Provide enough public space to enable people to come into contact with other members of the community.

Avoid entire neighborhoods of low income housing.
See photograph (below) of the consequences of an entire low income housing neighbourhood

Avoid entire neighborhoods of only high rise buildings.

See photograph (below) of a housing development in the Netherlands that combines low and high rise dwellings

Make sure a neighborhood with affordable housing and small dwellings has enough public space. Money should still be invested in developing well-designed public space, even if affordable housing is being developed and the earnings from selling the land or dwellings is relatively low. Well-designed public space makes an area appear more affluent and enables contact with other members of the community—thus encouraging residents to remain in the area.

2. Building functions
Certain types of facilities can improve the quality of life for residents—including small shops, cafés and activities for children. However, some facilities are a potential source of nuisance and insecurity for residents in the vicinity, undermining their quality of life. High concentrations of bars, pubs and clubs often generate noise, anti-social behaviour and street urination. Some facilities may be visited frequently
by people from outside the area during the day, but be left vacant during evenings and weekends—such as office blocks and shops—increasing the actual risk of crime and fueling insecurity amongst those living nearby. Any facilities planned for residential areas must therefore be carefully located and designed. Additional security measures should be designed into residential buildings that are situated close to facilities to ensure non-residents are unable to gain access to the buildings.

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<th>DOs</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide a mix of functions to create a more lively and convivial urban space. For example, dwellings may be located above shops so that facilities do not become deserted during the evenings and weekends.</td>
<td>• Do not mix functions likely to cause some inconvenience. For example, situating buildings with vulnerable functions—such as homeless shelters, sex shops, etc—adjacent to a café or post office. This is likely to generate insecurity amongst users, who may be visiting nearby facilities or walking, cycling through the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take steps to ensure that facilities such as cafés and bars are not an inconvenience or nuisance for residents—e.g. maintain a clear route for pedestrians to pass by people sitting at tables outside a café and ensure no drinking on the street after a certain time in the evening.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide additional security for those living close to facilities that attract people during the day and/or are deserted at night or at weekends.</td>
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*See photograph (below) of dwellings above shops*

*See photograph (below) of a coffee shop and sex club along an important cycle-track in the Netherlands*
Attempt to create a lively urban environment by providing facilities on the first floor of buildings (i.e. create active frontages).

In the Netherlands, parking facilities are located below ground, or higher than third floor to help enhance the liveliness of the first and second floors.

*See illustration (below) of car parking facilities located on higher floors to create active frontages on the ground floor.*

3. **Sense of ownership**

Feelings of security amongst residents are enhanced by evidence of private space within a residential area. Indicators of private space may be real, in that they physically prevent intruders from entering (e.g. doors, fences and gates), or *symbolic*, in that they psychologically deter intruders from entering. Psychological boundaries include changes in road texture or colour, ornamental planting and signage.

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<tr>
<td>Give every house a front garden.</td>
<td>Do not design houses without a front garden, otherwise residents close their curtains for more privacy and cannot survey the streets. See photograph (below) of dwellings with no front gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Front gardens should be between 2 and 5 meters deep. See photograph (below) of front gardens that are of an adequate size.</td>
<td>Do not make front gardens too small—otherwise residents will still feel the need to close their curtains in order to have more privacy. See photograph of dwellings where the front gardens is too small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use physical and symbolic barriers to create a sense of ownership amongst residents and deter intruders. Use physical barriers to create and identify private space around the dwelling.</td>
<td>Do not rely simply on symbolic barriers (e.g changes in colours or textures of paving) around the dwelling—physical barriers are also required close to the dwelling to provide real privacy.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
4. Visibility and surveillance

Feelings of insecurity when walking through an area can occur if parts of the environment are obscured from view, there are hiding places for potential attackers, and there is potential of becoming lost. Residents feel more secure when there is clear visibility in terms of the length and width of sight lines and by the perception of being surveyed by other residents. Opportunities for surveillance may be undermined by the presence of hiding places for potential offenders and by feelings of isolation; passing along or through such areas can be a frightening experience because people have little control over the situation. Feelings of control are also undermined when visitors cannot understand the environment and orientate themselves appropriately. Signage and landmarks to orientate people in the environment are important to increase feelings of control and reduce feelings of insecurity (Bell, Green, Fisher & Baum, 2001).

Windows of dwellings facing public spaces are found to have a strong reassuring effect on residents and visitors due the possibility that help can be summoned, if required. Major thoroughfares for pedestrians and entrances to blocks of flats should be visible from dwellings, public buildings, cars, etc. Rooms or infrastructure designated for common use in residential buildings should not be situated in the basement or in isolated parts of the building—as residents may be fearful of going there.

The idea is to encourage to these paths, routes and spaces to be populated by people. However, if ‘social control’ is impossible to organise, quiet areas and semi-public spaces (e.g. city parks, railway stations, pedestrian underpasses, bicycle sheds and storage spaces) can be closed during certain times of the day. At the very least, the option to close these spaces should be provided.

Some locations generate insecurity because they are quiet and isolated during particular times of the day or night, such as industrial estates, large office complexes, public transport stations, shopping centers and city parks. Additionally, locations that are sporadically populated, such as multi-storey car parks, underpasses or semi-public spaces within dwellings and blocks of flats, can be places of insecurity. This situation may be improved if these locations are populated or at least watched over by residents. The diversity of functions in a neighbourhood is therefore an important factor. Large, mono-functional and isolated areas should be avoided, as surveillance by others day and night will be difficult to provide.

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<tr>
<td>Create diversity in terms of use—housing, shops and office space.</td>
<td>Avoid large, mono-functional and isolated areas where surveillance by others cannot be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure diversity in terms of residents to ensure that dwellings are occupied at different times of day and night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure proper surveillance for cycle-tracks. Tracks should be in view of dwellings, cars or public buildings.</td>
<td>Avoid cycle tracks that are isolated and are not in view of dwellings, cars and public buildings. These routes have no proper surveillance.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>See photograph (below) of cycle track well overlooked by dwellings</em></td>
<td><em>See photograph (below) of an isolated cycle track</em></td>
</tr>
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</table>

| Ensure proper surveillance of people using pedestrian routes and public spaces (i.e. overlooked by people and dwellings) | Place windows on dwellings to enable residents to overlook routes and public areas |
| Consider closing quiet areas and semi-public spaces during certain times of the day or night, if social control cannot be achieved. |

<p>| Place high shrubs at least four meters from the side of a route for bicycles or pedestrians. This increases the visibility of the path. | Do not place high shrubs next to routes for bicycles or pedestrians. They should be a minimum of 2 meters from the edge of the pavement |</p>
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| - Take the corners out of any paths to the rear of the property (1 by 1 meter) to enhance visibility.  
See photo (below) of alleyway with rounded off corners | - Where possible, avoid developing paths to the rear of properties that might give access to potential burglars. |
| ![Photo of alleyway with rounded off corners](image1.jpg) | ![Illustration of rear path behind residential areas designed to have enhanced visibility](image2.png) |
| - If a path has a dead-end, make the path short. This way it is immediately visible to users that the path has a dead-end. |   |
- Use landmarks to help orientation.

*See photograph (below) of a metro station in Amsterdam with a very noticeable landmark — a large piece of public artwork in the shape of two stacked tables (centre right)*

- Ensure good surveillance of entrances to flats and houses.

- Avoid recessed doorways on ground floor.

*See photograph (below) of a shop with a recessed doorway*

- Place bay windows on higher levels as this creates the perception of being surveyed.

- All functions for the residents should be located in the main buildings.

- There should be no solitary small buildings outside the main building or in public space (e.g. residents’ car park is not located within the main residential building).

- Do not situate rooms or infrastructure designated for common use in the basement or in isolated parts of the building.

5. **Lighting**

People feel more secure when they can see others clearly. The facial features of a potential offender should be identifiable from a distance of at least 4 metres in order to improve the personal safety of potential victims. This means that natural and artificial lighting are important methods for reducing fear of crime and insecurity. However, lighting should not be used where routes and public spaces are unsafe — as it may create a false sense of security.
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<tr>
<td>• Provide lighting for public areas. Lighting should be designed to have an even coverage.</td>
<td>• There should be no substantial light differences —otherwise shadows will be created.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• There should be no substantial light differences —otherwise shadows will be created.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not provide lighting on routes that are unsafe at night—this would give a false safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>See photograph and illustration (below) of routes through a park that are not surveyed at night, and where lighting gives a false sense of safety.</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Where possible, provide daylight in underground situations, such as car parks and pedestrian tunnels.

*See photograph of a daylight in a subterranean tunnel*

- Avoid using poor quality lighting, such as orange lighting (i.e. SOX or low pressure natrium lighting), as it is difficult to distinguish colours.

- Put lighting in tunnels and use this both day and night.

- Try to ensure that there are no blinding lights. For example, from cars passing by in the opposite direction.

### 6. Escape routes for potential victims

People feel more secure when able to escape from a potential attacker. Escape routes for a potential victim can therefore reduce fear of crime and insecurity. However, there should not be too many routes as this might facilitate the activities of offenders and increase the actual risk of crime.

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<tr>
<td>- Provide sufficient (escape) routes for victims.</td>
<td>- Avoid providing too many (escape) routes that would help offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>See photograph (below) of a double row of bicycle-lockers at a railway station. People using the row near the concrete wall can leave the zone at both ends.</em></td>
<td><em>The illustration (below) shows a new neighborhood in the Netherlands that is surrounded by water. Many bridges have been provided to give pedestrians and cyclists a choice of possible routes. However, fewer bridges would have given offenders less access to escape routes and reduced the risk of crime.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Every 200 meters, provide a crossroad for pedestrians or bicycles using solitary roads.</td>
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7. Attractiveness and maintenance

People feel more secure in attractive environments that are well-maintained—such environments are generally cleaner, and free from litter and graffiti. People perceive crime in an area that has grime.

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| • Protect large surfaces—like blank walls—along main roads against graffiti.  
• Consider growing vegetation against an unprotected, blank wall.  
• Consider using special coating to prevent graffiti.  
• If graffiti cannot be prevented, use materials and objects that are easy to clean  
• Inspect the site regularly, removing any graffiti immediately. | • Avoid erecting large brick walls along main roads, which can be vandalised.  

See photograph (below) of a brick wall along a main road providing an empty canvas and easy access for vandals. |

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| • Repair effects of vandalism as soon as possible —for instance remove graffiti within 24 hours. | • Do not block the visibility of building envelope from the main road by parking cars there. The cars parked on the pavement obscure the view from windows and doors, and prevent the use of the path for pedestrians.  

See photograph (below) of vehicles parked on a footpath, obstructing pedestrian use. |
Integrate safety and security into the design—security features should not be clearly visible as such.

See photograph showing security integrated into the design. Despite consulting CPTED principles over a five year period, the security features are not immediately apparent to visitors—this is how it should be.

Do not design high-quality objects that are difficult to maintain.

Design areas for specific use in the environment. For instance, construct an area specifically for people to park their bicycles.

Do not create opportunities for unintended use. For instance, a fence should not be used for parking bicycles. Consider creating fence openings that are too small to put chains through and too big to attract graffiti artists.

8. Presence of others who are perceived as different or threatening

People may feel insecure in the presence of people that they cannot relate to—including people of a different ethnic background, young people dressed as punks, Goths or rockers, homeless people, alcoholics, beggars and prostitutes. Fear is particularly acute if these people are associated with criminal activity, such as those taking or selling drugs. Indeed, the sight of drug-users on the street is a major source of fear of crime amongst European citizens (ICVS, 2004/5).

Facilities should be provided for those engaged in legitimate behaviour, but whose presence might cause fear amongst residents (e.g. young people). In addition, steps should be taken to deal with social problems that give rise to drug-taking, homelessness, prostitution and begging. However, it should be noted that shelters for homeless people and facilities for drug-users may increase fear of crime amongst residents in the area. Such facilities must therefore be carefully located, following consultation with local residents. If consultation does not occur, residents may oppose the location of such facilities in their neighbourhood, which means those in need would not have the facilities they require.

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<tr>
<td>Provide facilities for young people—such as sports facilities, youth shelters, skateboard parks and music venues.</td>
<td>Do not design high-quality objects that are difficult to maintain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate facilities for young people within sight of local residents, but not so near that residents are disturbed by noise, etc.</td>
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</table>
Establish and support schemes for homeless people, prostitutes and drug-addicts

Locate shelters for homeless people and facilities for recovering drug addicts along main roads, so that those visiting such facilities blend in to the crowd.

Do not provide facilities for homeless people, drug-addicts, etc. right in the middle of a residential areas—where people who are ‘different’ will stand out.

See photograph (below) of a homeless person in a residential area

9. Formal guardians

The presence of formal guardians—such as police officers or security staff—helps make people feel more secure. Formal guardians have a particularly important role to play in relation to facilities that are often frightening for people to use, such as multi-storey car parks.

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<tr>
<td>Ensure that security staff operate in public parking garages or other underground or multi-storey spaces</td>
<td>Ensure that the building has good sightlines and that security staff can be easily summoned by visitors.</td>
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</table>
Where necessary, support communication between security staff and visitors through the use of CCTV, Public Address systems or emergency buttons. 

*See photograph (below) of a security officer in a bicycle lockup area. The presence of formal guardians can easily be seen.*

![Photograph of a security officer in a bicycle lockup area.]

The need for CCTV should be stipulated at the design phase of the building's development. This will make it easier to set up cameras later.

*Don’t use CCTV if you can’t guarantee follow-up.* 

*See photograph (below) of an unstaffed surveillance room*

![Photograph of an unstaffed surveillance room.]

10. *Informal guardians*

Informal guardians, such as residents and passers by also have an important role to play in helping people feel more secure. The presence of informal guardians reduces people’s fear of certain crimes, and provides the possibility of help and support in the event of problems. = more secure.

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<tr>
<td>Routes should be designed to be used by a combination of cars, bicycles and pedestrians. This increases the likelihood that routes for cyclists or pedestrians will be well-used and overlooked by others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not design routes for bicycles and pedestrians that are likely to be isolated and to be poorly surveyed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>See photograph of a subterranean tunnel that allows visual contact between bicycles and cars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Try to provided opportunities for a mixture of functions—e.g. residential dwellings and business premises. This will the numbers of informal guardians in the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not develop routes for cyclists and pedestrians through mono-functional working areas.</td>
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Create transparent baseboards to enhance informal surveillance. This allows those inside the building to survey what occurs outside and provide assistance, if necessary.

See photographs (below) of commercial buildings with transparent baseboards.

Avoid using shutters that prevent surveillance and reduce the attractiveness of the area.

See photograph (below) of building with closed shutters at ground level.
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