



5 minute safety talk

After a day at work, safety may be the last thing you think about as you walk through the company parking lot. Between wondering what to make for dinner and running over the lists of things to do when you get home, you may take your personal safety for granted.

It's estimated that there are more than 75 million parking spaces for workplace or commuter parking in the United States. A company should provide employees with a safe parking lot and protection while getting to and from that lot.

Pitfalls in the parking lot

Some of the more common parking lot hazards include potholes, cracks, unclear parking lot striping and lack of proper signage (including stop signs where they may be needed). Broken bottles and other debris should never be left littering the parking area.

In colder climates, standing water, snow and ice are definite hazards. Another potential hazard may exist if your company has a fire lane or a driveway between its parking area and building that employees must cross to enter the facility. In your company parking lot, walkways should be clearly marked and proper signage should be present for autos to yield to pedestrians.

Light up your lot

Most experts agree that lighting is the most important security precaution for deterring parking lot crime. Parking lots should have enough lighting so there are no dark spots in the lot. Exit and entrance lights should be at a 20-foot level. When driving into a dimly lit parking lot, drivers are more likely to accidentally not clear a building corner or hit pipes sticking out from a building.

The presence of uniformed security officers is another good way to prevent crime in parking lots. Guards should patrol the lot and vary their route. Ideally, companies should offer security guards that can escort employees to their vehicles. This is especially true for workplaces with several shifts, where workers may be coming in and going out in the dark. Added security can be provided by closed-circuit television monitoring systems.

Emergency telephones located throughout the lot can help deter crime and protect workers. A fence and a gate at the entrance can prevent trespassing and illegal activities in the lot. If a lot has more than one gate, all gates except the main entrance should be closed during non-peak periods.

It is best if you park near other cars and under lights, and to have your keys ready as you approach your vehicle. If your company provides security escorts, you should contact them when leaving a shift, so a guard can either watch you walk to your vehicle, or escort you. If your company has more than one shift, those on day shift should be encouraged to park farther away from the building entrance so that people coming in on the later shift can park close to the building, since they will be leaving in the dark.

Winter parking hazards

In winter months, parking lot hazards can increase because it gets dark earlier and more employees come out of the day shift into darkness. In cold weather, as a pedestrian, you may find yourself walking through the lot with your head covered to keep warm, not looking up, and you may be less likely to see cars driving through the lot. As a driver, you may not be aware of snow plows and snow-clearing operations, so you may need to be extra careful when pulling in and out of lots.

Drive safely

When driving in a parking lot, be careful backing up and sound your horn when you back up. Do not rely on your vehicle's mirrors when driving through tight areas; there are too many blind spots. Take the time when driving to watch for pedestrians. Avoid cutting through empty parking spaces and lanes. When driving, obey the pavement directional arrows, crosswalk markings and posted speed limits. It is recommended that you drive no faster than 5 mph to 10 mph in parking lots.

Education is key

A company should educate its employees about how to be safe in parking lots because it makes them active partners in protecting their own safety. This kind of safety information should be provided to employees through newsletters, safety handbooks and during safety meetings.

If you follow these tips, you will have a safer company parking lot, and you will feel more secure about arriving and leaving work.