



## The Problem of Disorder at Budget Motels

This guide begins by describing the problem of disorder at budget motels, and reviewing factors that contribute to it.<sup>†</sup> It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

A wide variety of problems occur at budget motels, including

- disturbances,<sup>††</sup>
- domestic violence,
- theft,
- auto theft and theft from autos,<sup>†††</sup>
- public drinking,
- vandalism,
- prostitution,
- drug dealing and use,
- fights,
- clandestine drug-lab operations,<sup>††††</sup>
- sexual assault, and
- robbery.

Many of these problems can be reduced through better motel management, design, and regulation.

<sup>†</sup> Temporary overnight lodging falls into two general categories: motels and hotels. At motels, guests (registered room occupants) and visitors (people who enter the grounds but are not registered guests) can directly access rooms without having to enter the motel lobby or main building. At hotels, guests and visitors must pass through the front lobby or enter the building through an outside door and an interior corridor to get to the rooms.

<sup>††</sup> An analysis of motel calls for service in Chula Vista, California, found that the most typical citizen call was about a disturbance of some sort. A significant portion involved guests who wouldn't leave or pay (Morris 2003).

<sup>†††</sup> For further information, see *Thefts of and From Cars in Parking Facilities*, Guide No. 10 in this series.

<sup>††††</sup> For further information, see *Clandestine Drug Labs*, Guide No. 16 in this series.



In a number of communities, certain motels generate significant numbers of service calls and consume inordinate levels of police resources. Problem motels are frequently hot spots for both nuisance activity and more serious incidents, such as robbery and sexual assault. In addition, problem motels inhibit nearby economic redevelopment<sup>1</sup> and reduce the number of safe, clean lodging units available for tourists and travelers.

### **Factors Contributing to Disorder at Budget Motels**

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses.

The very nature of overnight lodging makes it conducive to crime and disorder. Motels and hotels house people only temporarily, often in commercial areas with high crime rates. Because budget motels offer low rates, accept cash, and often have a relatively unrestricted environment, local residents with illicit or antisocial intentions find them particularly attractive. Drug sales, prostitution, loud parties, and other activities can often be undertaken at motels with less risk than at private residences. Motel guests have little motivation to report drug dealing and prostitution because they have no long-term stake in the motel. In addition, motel managers often have a limited opportunity to get to know the backgrounds of the people on their premises. Finally, in municipalities that lack the resources to provide motel oversight, motel managers have little incentive to accept responsibility for problems.

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Motels attract crime, in that people inclined to commit it<sup>†</sup> are drawn to them because their conditions and reputations are favorable for doing so.<sup>2</sup> Poorly managed motels also enable crime by attracting offenders to a location with weak oversight.<sup>3</sup>

### *Motel Economics*

In 2002, the lodging industry posted revenues of more than \$102 billion.<sup>4</sup>

In general, lodging establishments that charge nightly rates of less than \$60 fall under the budget category. However, both the price and the amenities at budget motels can vary greatly.<sup>††</sup> Room rates—even for the same motel chain—differ significantly by location, season, and day of week. The upscale budget motels (which account for 25 percent of all U.S. lodging units) are typically chain motels, some of which cater to business travelers and tourists and offer fitness centers, complimentary breakfasts, and premium movie channels. Low-end budget motels (13 percent of all U.S. lodging) are typically independent properties that charge \$20 to \$45 per night, and may not offer any amenities except for cable movies.

While some low-end motels offer safe, clean lodging (and some high-end motels do not), low-end motels are more likely to experience crime and disorder problems. A study of Chula Vista motels by California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), found that low room rates were strongly correlated with higher call-for-service rates.<sup>6</sup> Compared with motels that charged from \$41 to \$60 a night, those that charged \$40 or less per night had twice the number of service calls per room, and more than two-and-a-half times the number of arrests per room.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>†</sup> In Chula Vista, an estimated 21 percent of guests and visitors at several problem motels were on probation or parole, compared with less than 2 percent of California's overall adult population (Theisen 2002a).

<sup>††</sup> Some motels in the rural Southwest have nightly rates of less than \$20; in these markets, motels with nightly rates of \$35 are high-end. In contrast, low-end budget motels in major metropolitan areas generally charge between \$30 and \$45 a night, and high-end budget motels may charge up to \$80 a night. The rates quoted in this guide do not apply to all motels, but are included to give you a general idea of the cost of budget lodging.



Cheap motels did not always pose crime and disorder problems. In the 1930s and 1940s, individually owned and operated motels offered travelers an eclectic, economical array of relatively safe lodging options. In the 1950s, corporations such as Holiday Inn and Howard Johnson sought to capitalize on the growing national travel market by offering consumers brand-name, standardized lodging. The interstate highways built in the 1950s and 1960s favored the chains by essentially rerouting motorists away from the older, independent establishments, many of which were located along aging roads that ran parallel to—but were difficult to access from—the new interstates.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, major motel chains built their properties right at the interstate exits; motorists seeking independent motels had to bypass the chains and venture farther from the interstate to find them.

*Steve Morris*



**In an effort to attract customers, older motels such as this urban Arizona establishment offer rock-bottom prices for longer term guests, essentially creating low-income housing.**



The smaller, non-chain motels had difficulty competing with the large national chains under these circumstances. To survive economically, they began catering to the lower end of the market; some turned into adult motels,<sup>†</sup> while others served as housing for low-income people. Unable to afford upkeep, many of the formerly quaint motels deteriorated and became havens for crime and disorder.<sup>††</sup> Unsightly and crime-prone motels can inhibit economic growth in the surrounding areas.

### *Motel Layout and Features*

Originally built to accommodate the adventurous traveler of the 1930s and 1940s, motels were marketed as driver-friendly—motorists could drive right up to their rooms.<sup>†††</sup> Ironically, what was originally a selling point is now one of the most detrimental aspects of motels, from a crime prevention standpoint. Direct access to rooms allows problem guests and visitors to come and go without being seen by motel personnel. Regardless of size,<sup>††††</sup> motels with unimpeded pedestrian and vehicle access to rooms can be difficult to manage, and may have a relatively high number of service calls if they serve a risky clientele.

### *Motel Personnel*

Unlike hotels, many motels have a small staff. In some cases, the same individual who owns the motel also manages it and works the front desk. A midsize budget motel generally has an owner, a manager, one or more front desk clerks, several housekeepers, and, sometimes, a security guard, typically on contract. Upper-end and larger budget motels usually have additional staff that fill these roles.

<sup>†</sup> The definition of "adult motels" varies from one jurisdiction to the next, but they often rent rooms by the hour and advertise the availability of in-room pornographic movies.

<sup>††</sup> There is evidence that drug dealers sometimes operate out of financially strained motels and apartment complexes because the property managers are unlikely to have the will or resources to stop them (Eck 1995b).

<sup>†††</sup> The word "motel" is derived from the words "motorist" and "hotel" (Roadside Architecture 2002).

<sup>††††</sup> More than half of the 41,000 lodging establishments in the United States have between 15 and 75 rooms. The majority of these properties are likely motels, although some larger motels may have up to 200 rooms (American Hotel & Lodging Association 2003).



*Karin Schmerler*



**Drive-up motel rooms allow unrestricted and anonymous access to guest quarters at any hour of day or night.**

Although there are notable exceptions, family-operated motels tend to have higher calls-for-service-per-room (CFS/room) ratios than chain motels. The CSUSB study found that family-operated motels' CFS/room ratios were 60 percent higher than those at non-family-operated motels.<sup>10</sup> As of 2000, approximately 60 percent of hotels and motels were chain lodgings, and 40 percent were independently owned and operated.<sup>11</sup>

### *Motel Clientele*

At a typical lodging establishment, 80 percent of the guests are tourists, business travelers, or meeting or convention attendees. The remaining 20 percent have other reasons for staying, including personal reasons and special events.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, at budget motels with crime and disorder problems, it is not unusual to find that 80 percent or more of the guests are local residents staying

for personal reasons, and just 20 percent of the guests are tourists or business travelers. There is some indication that motels experience a "tipping point" with respect to clientele. If a motel rents out rooms to enough problem guests, then more problem guests—and fewer legitimate guests—will be attracted to that motel. In some cases, just one problem guest can discourage legitimate guests from renting rooms.<sup>13</sup>

A number of motels cater predominantly to local clients with a wide variety of reasons for renting budget rooms. Low-income workers sometimes seek long-term housing at motels rather than apartments, because motels do not require a first and last month's deposit and let guests "pay as they go." People living day-to-day may be able to pay \$38 a night for a motel room (with an average monthly total of more than \$1,100), but unable to pay \$500 all at once for an apartment. Motels also offer free furnishings, as well as cable television, electricity, and a telephone.<sup>14</sup> People lacking steady jobs also rent motel rooms nightly, short term, or long term, for the same reasons.<sup>†</sup>

Seasonal or short-term laborers, such as migrant and construction workers, also rent budget motel rooms, for anywhere from several weeks to several months.<sup>††</sup> In some cases, government agencies that subsidize housing refer specific groups of people to motels. For example, the agencies sometimes provide public-assistance recipients and parolees with housing vouchers they can use at motels.

<sup>†</sup> In Anaheim, California, where the typical apartment costs \$1,200 a month, an estimated 2,000 of the city's 310,000 residents lived in motels full time before the city enacted long-term rental restrictions on the properties (Hill and Associated Press 2000).

<sup>††</sup> Seasonal laborers staying at motels for long periods can create ready markets for prostitution and drugs; if the laborers are paid in cash and do not use banks, they are particularly vulnerable to robbery or room burglary.



A considerable number of budget-motel users seek rooms for criminal or nuisance purposes. Prostitutes and their customers rent rooms to secure safe, cheap places to conduct business; drug dealers use motels to contact buyers and make transactions; smugglers use motels as way stations for people they've smuggled into the country; and partiers rent rooms to get away from their usual environment, drink alcohol or use drugs, and generally behave in ways that are less acceptable at home.

#### **The Calls-for-Service-per-Room Ratio: A Common Denominator**

Using a calls-for-service-per-room (CFS/room) ratio allows for a standardized comparison of problem levels across motels of different sizes. The ratio is computed by dividing a motel's total number of calls for service in a 1-year period by the number of rooms at the motel. For example:

$$87 \text{ CFS} / 39 \text{ rooms} = 2.2 \text{ CFS/room}$$

$$52 \text{ CFS} / 12 \text{ rooms} = 4.3 \text{ CFS/room}$$

You can use both citizen- and officer-initiated calls to calculate CFS/room ratios—either independently, for different perspectives on motel problems, or together, for total CFS/room ratios. To download an Excel spreadsheet you can use to calculate CFS/room ratios, see <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels>

Regardless of their motivation for frequenting motels, guests and visitors who live within 30 miles of a motel tend to be higher-risk clients and cause more problems than tourists or business travelers. The probation rates of problem-motel guests and visitors who provided local addresses to Chula Vista officers were 13 times those of





California's general adult population. In contrast, no tourists questioned at the same motels indicated they were on probation or parole.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the CSUSB study found that the percentage of local guests staying at a motel was positively correlated with the motel's CFS/room ratio; in other words, the higher the number of local guests, the higher the number of CFS/room.<sup>16</sup>

Long-term<sup>†</sup> guests also pose risks for motels. The CSUSB study found that the average length of stay at a motel was strongly correlated with citizen-initiated CFS/room ratios: the longer the average stay, the higher the citizen-initiated CFS/room ratio.<sup>17</sup> Because they are designed to accommodate short-term guests, motel rooms are not typically stocked with cleaning products such as disinfectants, rags, dusters, mops, and vacuum cleaners, and can quickly deteriorate without frequent housekeeping and maintenance—services that low-end motels do not generally provide.<sup>18</sup> Problem long-term guests are also difficult to remove from motels. In many jurisdictions, motel guests are considered legal tenants after 28 days of renting, and managers must have them evicted if they want them to leave.

Prostitutes are among the riskiest clients motels serve. The CSUSB report found that motels that reported having problems with prostitution in the prior month had very high average CFS/room ratios compared with motels that reported other serious problems, including drug sales.

Due to the number of people that pass through a motel on a given night, and the need to quickly make decisions on nightly rentals, managers cannot conduct the type of lengthy background checks on would-be guests that are typically done on prospective apartment renters. In

<sup>†</sup> A person who stays seven or more days at a motel can be considered a long-term guest. In some jurisdictions, making weekly payments for motel rooms constitutes tenancy (Campbell DeLong Resources Inc. and Portland Police Bureau 1999).



addition, if business is down or motels have trouble attracting legitimate guests due to substandard facilities, staff might rent to suspicious guests to maintain cash flow. They also may have difficulty turning down undesirable guests during slow seasons.

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## Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of disorder at budget motels. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

† Annual budget-motel CFS/room ratios that include both citizen- and police-initiated calls generally range from 0.25 to 2.0, but some communities have properties—especially non-chain motels—with ratios of 11.0 or higher.

## Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of disorder at budget motels, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

### *Calls for Service and Crime Incidents*

- How many citizen- and police-initiated service calls does your agency handle at budget motels each year? Has the volume of the two types of calls changed over time?
- What is the nature of the service calls and crime incidents at budget motels? Do certain types of calls and crimes occur more frequently at some properties?
- What is the annual CFS/room ratio<sup>†</sup> for each motel? Do the ratios vary significantly among similarly priced properties in the same neighborhood? (See <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels> for an example of how these ratios can vary considerably, even among motels in the same several-block area. See



<http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels> to obtain a chart template you can use to show the difference in CFS/room ratios for motels in your own jurisdiction.)

- For what types of crimes have police made arrests at motels? Are certain types of arrests—especially drug or prostitution arrests—more common at some properties?
- What crime and disorder problems have motels experienced but not reported?

### *Motel Management Practices*

- What specific management practices are in place at low-priced motels with annual CFS/room ratios below 1.0? Above 1.0? (Good management practices are described in the "Responses" section below. To download a copy of a survey you can use to interview motel managers, see <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels>.)
  - Have CFS/room ratios changed over time, particularly with a change in property management?
  - Who owns the motel? Is it independently operated, part of a franchise, or corporately owned? Does the owner have other properties? Obtaining information about a motel's owner(s) and managers, as well as any other parties who have an interest in the motel (such as mortgage holders, ground-lease holders, and insurers), is critical to reducing problems at the motel. Property profiles, commonly known as "lot books," list all parties with a financial interest in a motel. Lot books can often be obtained through city clerks who frequently contract with title search companies for this product. Professional skip-tracing search engines can supplement lot-book research by providing owner contact information, as well as information about tax liens on the property and civil suits against the owner(s).
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- Is the motel's business license up to date?
- How viable is the motel from a business perspective? How much money did the motel take in last year, and what was the average occupancy rate?<sup>†</sup>
- How willing is the owner/manager to take responsibility for motel problems, and to work with police to address them?
- Are there some security measures the manager would like to implement, but cannot due to cost, company policy, or zoning, planning, or fire code restrictions?
- How many motels rent to guests for more than 30 consecutive days? How many and what percentage of current guests in each motel are long-term tenants?

<sup>†</sup> Local government finance departments can estimate gross receipts through transient occupancy taxes paid. The national average occupancy rate for overnight lodging was 64 percent in 2000, 60 percent in 2001, and 59 percent in 2002 and 2003 (American Hotel & Lodging Association 2004). A motel with 40 rooms, an occupancy rate of 60 percent, and an average nightly rate of \$50 would have yearly gross receipts of \$438,000 (40 rooms x 0.6 occupancy x \$50 rate x 365 days).

#### *Property Condition and Layout*

- What is the general condition of the motel's rooms? Do they meet minimum standards of cleanliness, safety, and functionality?
  - What is the general condition of the motel's exterior? Is it well landscaped and maintained?
  - How many entrances and exits are there to the motel grounds? Does all foot and vehicle traffic have to pass by the front office to access rooms or public areas, such as the pool? Are both vehicle and pedestrian access impeded by hedging or some other barrier? Is there a fence around the property's perimeter, or is access controlled via a gate or other means?
  - How many entrances and exits are there to the motel building itself? Is access to the building limited by card keys or some other means? How quickly are card keys reprogrammed (e.g., immediately upon checkout, the day after checkout)?
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- Are there certain smaller areas/blind spots (nooks, hallways, parking lot sections, rooms at the back of the motel, etc.) that are particularly conducive to problem behaviors?

#### *Victims*

- How concerned about problem motels are local business employees, residents, and other people who frequent the area? What problems have they seen or experienced? How concerned are motel employees and long-term tenants about problems at the properties?
- How many employees and long-term tenants have been victimized by problem guests, and in what ways?
- How much have problem motels lost due to theft of motel property from rooms, vandalism, and unpaid rentals?

#### *Offenders*

- What percentage of the guests at individual motels live within 30 miles of them? What reasons do local guests or visitors give for frequenting the motels?
  - What are the probation/parole rates of guests at problem motels compared with those of guests at motels with low CFS/room ratios and those of the general population?
  - What percentage of arrestees at individual motels live within 30 miles of them? What reasons do problem guests (e.g., those who have been arrested or are on probation or parole) give for frequenting the motels with high CFS/room ratios? What do they find appealing about those motels? (See <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels> to download a
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copy of a motel-user survey you can use to estimate user probation and parole rates, as well as provide insights into what attracts problem guests and visitors to specific motels.)

### *Current Responses*

- How does the police department currently address motel problems? How effective have the responses been over the long term?
- How are other local government agencies—such as code enforcement, community development, health and sanitation, planning and zoning, city attorney's office, fire, and finance—addressing motel problems?
- What existing laws, ordinances, or regulations foster or constrain the ability of police and other city agencies to effectively address problems at budget motels?
- Are financial lending institutions that hold notes on the motels aware of the problems, and if so, what actions, if any, have they taken to improve the situation?

### **Measuring Your Effectiveness**

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.)

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The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to disorder at budget motels:

† Although citizen-initiated calls (primarily those from motel employees) may increase during the transitional period—when a motel is improving management procedures and changing its reputation—they should ultimately decrease as the motel becomes more able to prevent and handle problems.

†† Officer-initiated calls should decrease once the motels improve their management practices and/or control access to the property.

- fewer citizen-initiated calls for service per room, for each property;†
  - fewer crime incidents at motels;
  - less-serious crime incidents at motels;
  - fewer citizen-initiated calls for service and crime incidents in areas adjacent to problem motels;
  - reduced police time spent at motels;††
  - reduced concern about problem motels among neighboring businesses, residents, and others with a stake in reducing the problems;
  - reduced levels of visible disorder, such as loitering and graffiti, at problem motels;
  - increased tourist occupancy and decreased local occupancy at motels; and
  - increased number of motel rooms that meet minimum standards of cleanliness, safety, and functionality.
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## **Responses to the Problem of Disorder at Budget Motels**

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular motel-disorder problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

### **General Principles for an Effective Strategy**

**1. Enlisting community support to address the problem.** Changing the way motels do business requires the support of local elected officials; government agencies that can regulate overnight lodging establishments; business associations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and convention and visitors bureaus; and, to some extent, the motels themselves. These various parties should be

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† Taking elected officials and local business leaders on tours of problem motels can be an effective way of alerting them to specific issues.

†† At least 35 percent of Chula Vista motel managers indicated they had experienced the following problems in the prior month: theft, guest's refusal to leave, loud party, suspected drug dealing, and vandalism/graffiti (Bichler, Christie, and McCord 2003). Improved management practices can reduce the likelihood such problems will occur.

provided with detailed information about the nature and extent of motel problems before recommending any changes.† Well-funded regional and national motel chains may try to influence local politicians before they have all the facts, and small-business owners—even ones who manage enterprises that border on the criminal—can be a powerful local constituency for elected officials. Neighboring businesses, residents, and users of the areas near problem motels can help make the case for change.

**2. Obtaining cooperation from motel owners and managers.** Voluntary compliance with good motel management practices is possible to obtain from a segment of motels, and there are several natural incentives for managers to reduce problems at their properties. Legitimate motel owners have a financial interest in reducing crime and disorder problems—especially those that involve a potential loss of revenue, such as guests who damage rooms or refuse to pay.†† Safe, well-run, attractive motels can charge higher rates and maintain or increase annual revenue. Some managers would genuinely like to reduce the number of problem guests and visitors at their motels, but lack the necessary financial resources or knowledge about effective crime prevention measures at motels. (To download a copy of a management practices checklist you can provide to motel managers, see <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels>.) Independent motels, in particular, may not have the resources to make significant environmental changes, but they can make a number of management changes at little cost. National chains have more resources at their disposal and are highly capable of running safe motels, if they choose to do so. You can prioritize problem motels with uncooperative



managers or owners by CSF/room ratios, total number of citizen- and officer-initiated service calls, and community complaints. Uncooperative motels will have different leverage points. National budget chains may want to avoid negative publicity. Absentee motel owners may be persuaded to make changes that will reduce their exposure to liability or the likelihood of significant property damage.<sup>†</sup> Motel owners or managers involved in criminal activity at their motel can be forced to sell their business or radically change their business practices if they have been charged with or convicted of a crime. However, some motels may change the way they do business only under the threat of nuisance abatement or new local laws governing motel operations.

<sup>†</sup> Motel managers in Sandy City, Utah, were convinced that it was in their interest to prevent drug dealers from setting up methamphetamine labs in their motel rooms when informed that the cost of cleaning up and rebuilding a motel room after a drug lab explosion could be as high as \$25,000 (Thompson 1999).

### **Regulating Management Practices Through CFS/Room Ratios**

The city of Tukwila, Washington, requires motels to implement specific responses based on their yearly CFS/room ratios. All motels fall in one of three tiers established by the city: (1) less than or equal to 0.25 CFS/room/year; (2) 0.26 CFS/room/year to 1.0 CFS/room/year; and (3) more than 1.0 CFS/room/year. Motels and hotels in the tier with the fewest service calls do not have to make any changes. Motels in the middle tier must have a staff member on the property 24 hours a day, maintain a surveillance camera in the lobby at all times, and participate in a crime prevention assessment. Motels in the highest service-call tier must implement the middle-tier requirements, as well as submit employee names to the police department for background checks, train employees in proper management practices, install cameras in parking lots, implement crime-prevention-through-environmental-design recommendations, and make a number of other changes. Since being passed in the summer of 2000, police there report the initiative has reduced service calls by approximately 60 percent at motels with annual CFS/room ratios of more than 1.0.



† All agree that deadbolts, peepholes, door chains, solid doors and frames, and room telephones constitute basic security measures that all motels should have in place. As far as liability goes, the absence of these measures is considered evidence of unsafe lodging. Motels with established crime problems have also been expected to employ adequate numbers of security guards, install closed-circuit television (CCTV) in problem areas, and secure sliding-glass doors with bars (Slepian 2002).

†† In some communities, a ratio of 0.5 may be excessive, however, compared to other motels in the area.

††† Performance standards are not intended to discourage motel staff or others from calling the police in an emergency. Police should conduct a quick door-to-door tenant survey if they suspect a manager is training tenants not to call them. Motel managers facing a performance standard may argue that it is their right to call the police, and they should not be penalized for being proactive. However, if a motel chooses to cater to a high-risk clientele and has a high number of calls for service, the management should completely control access to the property. The management may also need to hire adequate security, both to handle repeat nuisance calls that should not require a police response, and to prevent more-serious incidents from occurring. If a motel cannot afford access-control measures and private security (if necessary), it should stop catering to a high-risk clientele.

**3. Establishing and enforcing minimum motel functionality and security standards.** All motels should comply with appropriate housing and building codes, and meet minimum security standards established through a combination of court decisions, legislation, and assessments by lodging managers.†

**4. Establishing crime-and-disorder performance standards and goals.** As noted earlier, CFS/room ratios vary significantly, even among comparable motels in comparable neighborhoods. Motels with low CFS/room ratios set a natural baseline for what can be accomplished at similar properties. Motels should be able to maintain annual CFS/room ratios of less than 1.0<sup>††</sup>; action should be taken against those that do not keep calls at or below this level. Incentives for reaching performance goals, such as city-sponsored signage, community development funds, or other enticements, may be offered to motels that maintain annual CFS/room ratios of 0.5 or less.<sup>†††</sup> Both research and successful crime-reduction projects at motels and other residential properties have shown that motel personnel—especially managers and owners—can effectively control crime and disorder on their properties through proper management practices.<sup>19</sup> Managers and owners have the greatest ability to ensure that their properties do not attract problem guests and visitors. However, many managers and owners are under the false impression that only police enforcement can reduce the problems at their motels, and rely primarily on local police to keep the order. Police agencies should avoid becoming de facto security services for motels for two reasons: traditional enforcement tactics are not particularly effective at reducing motel problems, and cities should not routinely subsidize the security operations of a for-profit industry. In general, it is important that police let motel managers or owners decide what specific steps to take to meet local



standards. If a police agency recommends specific changes at a motel, and those changes do not bring about the desired results, the motel may have grounds to argue against abatement or other enforcement actions designed to reduce problems.<sup>20</sup>

† Like guests, visitors should be directed to the front desk by the security staff or the property design (e.g., fencing that prohibits unimpeded motel access, walkways that lead directly to the front office).

## Specific Responses to Disorder at Budget Motels

### *Deterring/Screening Problem Guests and Visitors*

**5. Requiring all adult guests and visitors<sup>†</sup> to present government-issued photo ID at the front desk immediately upon arrival.** An ID requirement reduces the perception of anonymity at motels, reinforces personal accountability for behavior, and provides police with important information should a crime occur—all reducing the motel's appeal to problem guests and visitors. At minimum, front desk clerks should collect the following information from both guests and visitors:

- full name,
- home address,
- home telephone number,
- date of birth,
- government ID number and ID type,
- state and country of ID issuance,
- time of arrival, and
- number of assigned or visited room.

Desk clerks at motels with high CFS/room ratios should also collect the following from registered guests:

- name, address, and phone number of their employer, and
  - name and telephone number of an emergency contact.<sup>21</sup>
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Clerks should complete the guests' registration cards according to information verbally provided by the guests, then ensure the photo IDs contain the same information. Clerks should also visually verify and record guests' and visitors' license plate numbers, and issue corresponding parking permits that limit stays.<sup>22</sup> Staff should record all guest and visitor information on a government-approved registration form readily accessible to police and other city officials who need to review occupancy levels, such as finance department personnel.

**6. Requiring that guests and visitors be at least 21 years old to rent or visit a room, unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.** Minors are at particular risk of sexual assault or statutory rape at motels; age limitations on guests and visitors can help prevent these crimes. Maintaining a strict 21-or-older policy for both guests and visitors can also prevent underage drinking in motel rooms.

**7. Maintaining and enforcing "no rent" and "no trespass" lists.** Motel managers should retain the names and other registration information of people who have been arrested on the property, have caused a disturbance, have necessitated a call to police, are prohibited from renting at the motel as a result of a temporary restraining order or parole/probation conditions, or did not follow motel rules during rental. Motel management should ban such people from the property for a set period, typically six months to a year. You should consult legal counsel about the particular legal requirements of enforcing such bans in your jurisdiction.

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**8. Limiting visitors and contact between strangers.**

Motels should prohibit visitors between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.; people on the property between those hours should be guests or staff only. At particularly problematic motels, management may want to prohibit visitors entirely. In addition, motels should limit the number of unrelated guests to one or two per room, thus discouraging parties and underage drinking.<sup>23</sup> Front desk clerks should refuse to connect callers to rooms if the callers do not know the guests' full names.<sup>24</sup> Implementing and enforcing all of these policies can reduce a motel's appeal to prostitutes and drug dealers.

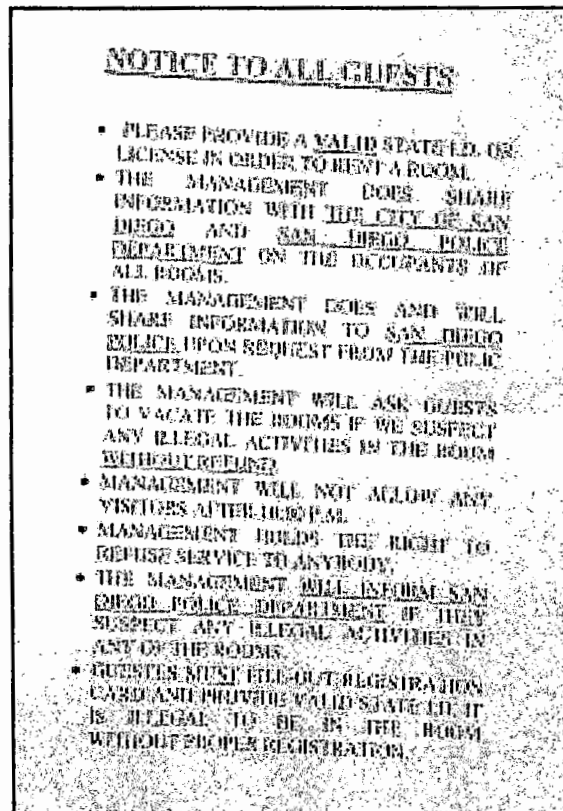
**9. Prominently posting notices and signs that clearly outline appropriate guest and visitor behavior, as well as the sanctions that will be levied against violators.<sup>25</sup>**

Sample rules include the following:

- No illegal activity (including drug use/sales, prostitution, and underage drinking) is allowed on the premises. If such activity is suspected, the management will notify the police and ask guests to leave the property, without a refund.
  - Room doors must be kept closed at all times.
  - No loitering is allowed on the premises.
  - No public drinking is allowed.
  - Playing loud music is not allowed.
  - Quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
  - All visitors must check in at the front desk.
  - Guest rooms may not be used for private parties.
  - Parking passes must be displayed in all vehicles parked in the lot, or they will be towed at the owners' expense.
  - The management shares registration information with local police.
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Posted signs, clearly stating the rules of the motel, can dissuade guests from engaging in illegal activities.

### 10. Guaranteeing payment from high-risk guests.

Motels that have experienced problems with guests who won't pay or leave can require a two-night cash deposit or a credit card imprint at check-in. This policy can help ensure that motels receive compensation for all rentals, as well as cover any losses or damages that may occur.





**11. Refusing to rent to known or suspected prostitutes, gang members, or drug dealers,<sup>†</sup> or to anyone clearly intoxicated or under the influence of illicit**

**substances.** Motel staff have the right to refuse service to anyone, as long as they do not discriminate against a protected class in making room rental decisions. (To download a list of criminal indicators that can be posted at the front desk for easy clerk reference, see <http://www.chulavistapd.org/motels>.) Woodbury, Minnesota, officers provide motels with detailed telephone listings of local escort services so motel clerks can cross-reference outgoing and incoming calls to rooms occupied by suspected prostitutes.<sup>26</sup> National City, California, police obtained temporary restraining orders that barred known prostitutes from certain motels.<sup>27</sup> Motels may want to consider charging for outgoing local telephone calls, which can discourage motel use by guests who plan to make a lot of local calls.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Prostitutes are often well-known to motel clerks, gang members may have gang-related tattoos, and drug dealers may have previously raised suspicion by making numerous brief phone calls from their rooms during prior motel stays. Based on a review of motel arrests, Sandy City officers developed a profile of people buying and selling drugs at the properties. The typical arrestee used methamphetamine, was between the ages of 18 and 35, provided a local address, and paid in cash at low-priced motels or used a fraudulent credit card at moderately priced motels. The arrestees also generally checked into motels in pairs and without luggage, and made and received numerous local phone calls (Thompson 1999).

**12. Implementing clear check-in policies, and training clerks in their use.** Clerks should provide guests and visitors with a copy of the "house rules." If the motel is experiencing serious problems, clerks should require guests and visitors to read and sign a form. Clerks should also ask guests why they are renting a room, how many visitors they expect, and how long they are staying. If guests indicate they will be staying seven days or more, motel managers should conduct more extensive screenings, which may involve credit, employment, and prior landlord reference checks.<sup>29</sup> Night clerks, who are often recent hires, may need additional training in guest screening and motel security procedures.<sup>30</sup>

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**13. Reinforcing formal and informal social controls over problem guests.** Police can inform those who oversee problem guests, such as military command staff and employers of seasonal laborers, about motels that experience relatively high levels of crime and disorder. The military can make problem properties "off limits" to personnel.<sup>31</sup> Police should provide oversight officials with details on the types of problems experienced at the motels, and, if applicable, inform them that there are plans to conduct enforcement operations at the properties, as well as change how they are run, so they are more restrictive with respect to photo ID requirements, visitor prohibitions, public drinking, and noise policies. Probation agencies can also set probation and/or parole conditions that prohibit offenders from frequenting specific motels with histories of drug problems and other criminal activity.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Managing Problem Guests and Visitors*

**14. Assigning potential problem guests to rooms near the front office or with high natural surveillance.** Some motel managers routinely rent suspicious guests rooms near the front office, so they can better monitor their behavior. Rooms that face a busy street can also provide natural surveillance of problem guests and their visitors.

**15. Employing well-trained, uniformed, on-site security guards, with clear expectations regarding duties.** Security guards should regularly and randomly patrol motel grounds and contact people who are loitering or behaving suspiciously. On large properties, guards

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should patrol on bicycle; on smaller properties, guards should be on foot. On all properties, they should carry professional two-way radios.<sup>33</sup> They should pay attention to problem areas; enforce no-trespass lists; photograph trespassers and provide pictures to police and other motel staff; check for vehicles without parking permits and for other lot violations, and knock on the appropriate guests' doors to have them correct the violations; and generally enforce all house rules regarding noise levels, visitors, etc. Guards should not fraternize with guests or visitors.

† Approximately 20 states do not require vehicles to display a front license plate.

**16. Prohibiting "back-in" parking.** Some motel guests who engage in illicit activity back into motel parking spaces to make it harder for others to get their license plate numbers,<sup>†</sup> and easier for them to leave quickly, if necessary. Prohibiting such parking will make the motel less attractive to those with criminal intentions.

**17. Inspecting the rooms of guests who refuse maid service or behave suspiciously after check-in.** Guests who have no luggage but anticipate an extended stay, bring a lot of luggage into a room for a one-night stay, or make and receive many local phone calls may be involved in producing methamphetamine.<sup>34</sup> If motel managers suspect drugs are being produced or sold, or find drug paraphernalia, they should call the police, who can inspect the room for evidence of illicit activity. You should consult with legal counsel about the laws governing police searches of motel rooms in your jurisdiction.



### *Changing the Physical Environment*

† The two most frequent problems experienced by Chula Vista motel managers were (1) too many people in a room (65 percent of managers reported experiencing this problem in the previous month), and (2) unauthorized guests/visitors in rooms (57 percent of managers) (Bichler, Christie, and McCord 2003). Controlling direct access to rooms can substantially reduce both problems.

**18. Limiting access to the property.** A key feature of a safe motel is its ability to control who has direct access to guest rooms and other parts of the property.† Motels can limit access in a variety of ways, including the use of perimeter fencing, electronic gates, security guards,<sup>35</sup> and a property design that requires all foot and vehicle traffic to pass by the front office.<sup>36</sup> Some motels have converted exterior corridors to interior corridors to control access. At a notorious airport motel in Oakland, California, security guards function as a human barrier to those trying to access motel rooms. They send guests to the front desk to register, and ask potential visitors for the full name and room number of the person they want to visit. If visitors can provide this information as it appears on the room rosters the guards have, the guards send them to the front desk to register; if they cannot, the guards ask them to leave. Service calls have dropped by 59 percent since this practice, along with a series of other changes, was implemented.<sup>37</sup> A Charlotte, North Carolina, motel that erected a fence to eliminate non-motel foot traffic

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This motel fenced an unnecessary entrance/exit to reduce "pull-through" traffic.