Is Poor Key Security Hurting Your Reputation?

By Carl Hanly

"Our identity was stolen."

"My apartment was entered when I wasn't home and my front door was left unlocked."

"Key fob access was inoperable during a power outage."

These snippets from reviews of multifamily communities reveal just how much residents value safety and security. If they don't have a good experience where they live, they'll warn others through posts online. As much as 98 percent of prospective residents read reviews before leasing an apartment, so negative feedback hurts your long-term success.

A critical part of providing a positive living experience is an effective key and access control policy. If you don't take the right steps to manage access to residents' homes, they're vulnerable to potential thefts and violent crimes. That's not to mention the legal and reputation risks to your business.

If you want to prevent poor key security from hurting your reputation, look for these three warning signs.

Inaccurate (or Nonexistent) Access Logs

It's important to have a verifiable record of each time an employee or vendor accesses a resident's home. If your records are inaccurate, it'll be difficult to investigate situations where a resident feels their safety or privacy has been compromised.

What does a reliable method for creating an audit trail look like? Above all, it should be automatic. Manual methods such as log books or spreadsheets are error prone. Just think about how easy it would be for a leasing agent to grab a key for a tour and forget to update the log.

Instead, opt for an electronic key or access control system that automatically authenticates users and records when each key is removed. Some systems may also notify residents when the key to their apartment has been removed, increasing transparency and avoiding unwelcome surprises.

Lax Data Protection

When handling a resident's sensitive data online, it's important to follow cybersecurity best practices. However, don't forget about physical security.

If a resident's identity is stolen due to your lax security measures, you better believe they'll talk about it online. At one community in Michigan, a former resident wrote a review about how a leasing agent had been stealing residents' information and applying for credit in their names. Using her access to residents' mailboxes, the employee would steal any correspondence related to identity theft to keep the victim from finding out about it.

To reduce the risk of something similar happening at your community, lock up sensitive records and secure keys to private areas using an electronic system that will create an audit trail.

Complaints

If people are complaining about your key management and security practices — whether in person or online — take heed.

These complaints reveal shortcomings in your security and offer you the opportunity to improve. Evaluate what went wrong: Is it a process issue? Are employees not following your policies? Are you using the wrong key management solution? Did the resident misunderstand the situation? After digging deeper, acknowledge and address each resident's concerns.

Implementing a reliable key management process will help prevent scenarios that have people turning to review sites and social media to complain about your community. Act now to protect your reputation.