

Key Control—Is it Necessary?

Ten years ago the term “key control” brought to mind a key cabinet with labeled keys and a master key. Only a handful of companies—among them Archon, Camden Property Trust and JPI—had started using computerized key control systems.

Today, most large companies and some smaller operators in the apartment industry have installed computerized systems, which code, secure and organize duplicate unit keys used by management for maintenance, pest control and lockouts. Online systems enhance operational efficiency.

Key control systems may reduce liability by preventing apartment keys from falling into the wrong hands. Significant monetary judgments have been awarded against owners and management companies based on premises liability—where there was an “unforced entry” by a perpetrator who used a key to gain entry for criminal purposes.

Laurie Baker, Regional Vice President, Camden Property Trust, said Camden made the decision to purchase an Internet-based key control system for the security it provides, ease of use and “the ability to have vital information at our fingertips, at properties and at other locations, like my office.”

For apartment owners and managers who are considering purchasing a key control system, here are things to consider:

Ease of use. Is the system being considered easy to use and easy to train on, including maintenance and security, in the case of dealing with being locked out at night? How quickly can a key be requested and pulled?

Security. Is access granted to only authorized employees with badge and PIN number, password or biometric screening?

Internet-Based. Is the system tied into the Internet so a property manager can get a community’s key control status and management reports online? Does the system send automatic alerts when exceptions occur, such as keys not being returned in a timely manner? Can reports be accumulated and analyzed



on a portfolio basis?

Audit Trail. Does the system automatically provide key status and usage reports and back them up so audit trail is preserved? It is important to have good documentation in case of litigation.

Cost. System prices range from \$15 to \$50 per unit. Careful analysis is necessary to determine whether all features offered are necessary for a particular community.

Keys Out. Does the system immediately report keys that are out and who holds that key? It is important to know quickly if a key is needed, for example, to show an available apartment.

Coded Keys. Are keys coded so that if a key is lost it cannot be matched to a unit?

Power. Is the system energy efficient? How long can the system operate with battery back-up?

Space. How much floor space does the system take? Will it fit into what is sometimes a crowded leasing office?

Two Keys. Does the system track both a primary key set and a duplicate key set, should the key get lost?

Making an investment in key control is a complex decision. The cost of potential litigation defense may be reduced. Good key management and the ability to analyze key usage data and enforce policy on a portfolio basis contribute to operational efficiency. And, like an alarm system, having installed key control at the community may create peace of mind. ■

Please see pages XX through XX for a list of NAA National Supplier’s Council members who provide security and key control products and services.

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