



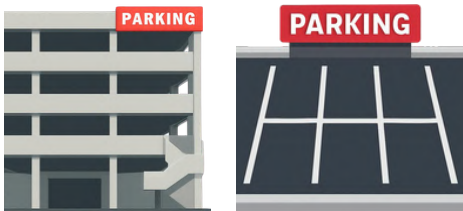
**ALWAYS AWAKE.
ALWAYS ON GUARD.**

LotGuard

Parking Deck vs Surface Lot:
Risk Differences Property
Managers Should Know

Parking Deck vs Surface Lot: Risk Differences Property Managers Should Know

Parking facilities and garages are one of the most common locations for violent crime in the United States, ranking third overall. And when incidents occur, property managers can face serious consequences. Unmonitored or poorly managed surveillance cameras increase liability risk, and negligent security settlements **can reach up to \$500,000+.**



But parking decks and surface lots don't carry the same risks. Their physical designs create entirely different vulnerabilities, and a security approach that works for one may leave the other dangerously exposed.

For commercial property managers overseeing mixed portfolios (office parks, retail centers, vacant lots, etc.), understanding how each parking structure affects risk exposure is the foundation of an effective security strategy. This article breaks down parking deck and surface lot risk differences and explains how smart mobile surveillance can mitigate risk before damage or liability exposure occurs.



Risks Explained: Parking Decks vs Surface Lots

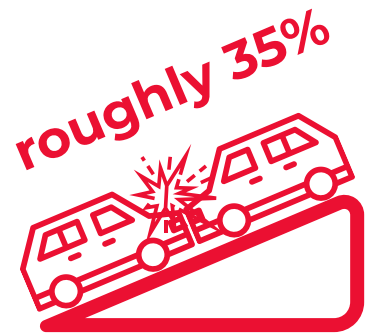
The physical design of parking spaces shapes almost every risk it carries. Surface lots are open to the elements, easy to enter/exit, and visible from most angles. Parking decks have multiple levels with columns, ramps, and stairwells, creating blind spots and make consistent surveillance harder. Neither is inherently more dangerous, but the risks are different:

Risk Type	Parking Deck	Surface Lot
Safety	Stairwells, ramps, and low-light levels create personal safety hazards	Open perimeters with risks concentrating after dark when foot traffic is low
Liability	Structural issues and access control gaps	Potholes, surface damage, and poor lighting
Fire and Environmental	Enclosed spaces trap heat and toxic fumes	Stormwater runoff and UV/weather damage
Crime	Blind spots from columns and levels	Open access, higher vehicle theft rates, squatting, and homeless encampments
Structural and Maintenance	Concrete degradation, steel rust, sagging floors, and water damage	Surface cracks, drainage issues, and line marking wear

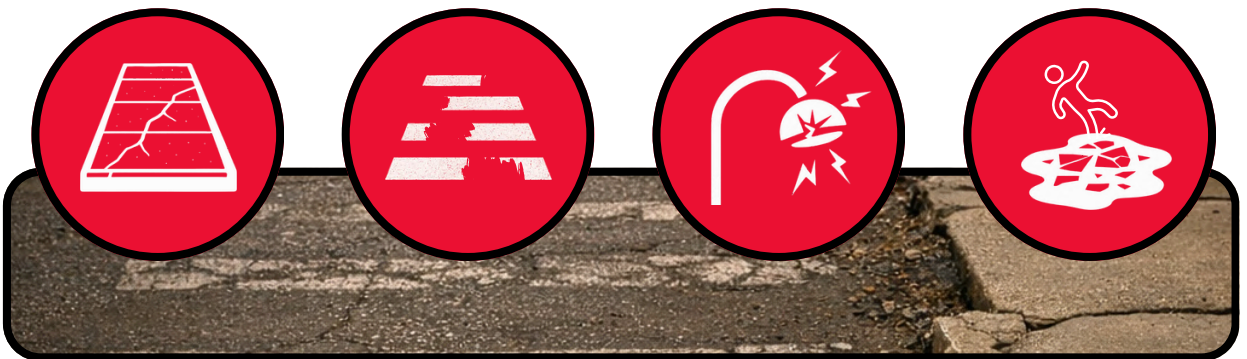
Risks Explained: Parking Decks vs Surface Lots

Safety Risks:

Parking Decks: Ramps and level changes are a hazard for both drivers and pedestrians. Going from bright daylight into a darker interior can cause momentary "blindness", increasing the risk of an accident. It's been noted that poor visibility contributes to roughly 35% of parking facility crashes. Poorly lit stairwells and elevator areas also create the perfect conditions for criminals to exploit.



Surface lots: Uneven sidewalks, missing (or faded) crosswalk markings, and poor lighting across large open areas create hazards, especially at night. In bad weather, pools of water and ice increase trip hazards and vehicle collisions.



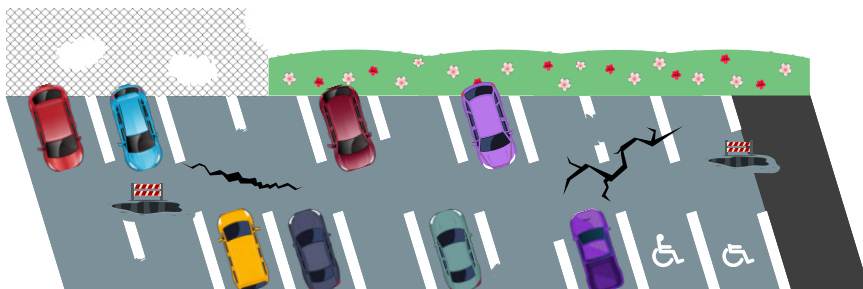
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Liability Risks:

Parking Decks: Liability exposure mostly stems from structural conditions and lighting issues. Cracked or uneven ramp surfaces and poorly lit areas are common causes of slips, falls, and injury claims. Beyond physical liability, poor lighting and inadequate security in parking areas also increase the risk of violent crimes.



Surface lots: Poorly kept lots create liability exposure for commercial property managers. Potholes, cracked sidewalks, faded markings, and insufficient lighting all increase the likelihood of accidents and claims. Common incidents include vehicle damage from potholes, falls due to uneven surfaces, and vehicle/pedestrian collisions in low-light conditions.



Risks Explained: Parking Decks vs Surface Lots

Fire and Environmental Risks:

Parking Decks: **32% of Electric Vehicle (EV) fires occur while parked.** In enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, heat, smoke, and toxic fumes build up much faster than they would outdoors, which can cause fires to spread more quickly and put human health at risk. Extreme temperatures can crack concrete surfaces, leading to structural damage.



Surface lots: Vehicle oil, coolant, and other fluids build up on open parking lots, and that runoff ends up in drains, creating environmental liability if it's not managed. Poor drainage speeds up surface damage, leading to more frequent maintenance and repairs. Also, in warmer climates, line markings and signage tend to fade faster in the sun.



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Crime and Security Risks:

Parking Decks: The structural design of parking decks (columns, ramps, multiple levels) is where fixed security cameras struggle the most. Criminals often target parking decks for this reason, knowing upper levels and blind spots are rarely monitored in real-time. Because parking decks are mostly enclosed, both vehicle-related crime and crime against people occur at a higher rate than in surface lots. In fact, **65% of drivers reported feeling unsafe in parking garages after dark.**



Surface lots: Reports from the US Department of Justice reveal that vehicle theft is **6x times more likely to happen in open surface lots than in staffed parking decks.** This is mainly because surface parking areas can be accessed from multiple points due to their open structural design. Unmanned lots are also more likely to attract squatters, loiterers, illegal dumpers, and suspicious after-hours activity that often goes unnoticed until significant damage is already done.



Risks Explained: Parking Decks vs Surface Lots

Structural and Maintenance Risks:

Parking Decks: Water ingress can cause concrete columns to crack and steel frameworks to rust, weakening the entire structure over time. Worn joints and overloads can cause sagging floors or even collapse.



Surface lots: Cracks, sink holes, loose gravel, faded markings, drainage issues, and heave and subsidence commonly occur in surface parking spaces. Left unaddressed, these issues compound and worsen with traffic loads.



6 Risk Mitigation Best Practises for Parking Facilities

Below, we outline 6 risk mitigation strategies for parking facilities:



Upgrade Lighting



Add Visible Surveillance



Schedule Regular Maintenance



Install Clear Signage



Fire Safety and Environmental Protocols



Insurance Coverage

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