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## Deadly Christchurch quake taught lessons on rebuilding

After earthquakes in 2011 killed 181 people and destroyed much of the downtown in Christchurch, New Zealand, the city set about rebuilding.



*Afp/Getty Images/files* **Calgary officials are listening to those in Christchurch, New Zealand, who rebuilt after a 2011 earthquake.**

Out of tragedy came opportunity — city leaders saw a chance to design a city that could be the safest in the world.

In Calgary last week for an international conference on crime prevention through environmental design, one of the people involved in Christchurch's rebuilding efforts saw parallels between the two cities.

"The thing that strikes me as so similar to Christchurch is the community surge of volunteers," said Sue Ramsey, who is in charge of crime prevention initiatives for Christchurch City Council.

And like Christchurch before it, Ramsey said Calgary has a chance to build on the outpouring of energy to re-imagine some of the city's public spaces

using crime prevention through environmental design — known as CPTED — in mind.

“It creates some social capital that opens up people’s minds going forward to things they might not have thought of,” she said.

“Hopefully, there are people in the city who will see they can become involved in designing inherently safer places.

CPTED focuses on making places safer mainly in two ways: Using design features such as lighting and sightlines to enhance safety; and considering how the space will be used, at what times, and by whom.

Christchurch is largely a safe city, but Ramsey said there was a widespread perception the core wasn’t safe after dark, largely due to unruly behaviour at bars and nightspots.

Before the quake, the city’s response was primarily enforcement — more officers — and increased use of surveillance cameras.

“Target hardening,” as it’s known, can be effective, but buying and maintaining technology like cameras has upfront and ongoing costs.

It can also create a fortress mentality — and in Christchurch’s case, the perception that downtown wasn’t safe persisted. Following the quake, Christchurch decided on another approach to the problem: To design and rebuild public spaces with safety and CPTED principles in mind.

“If we sit down and design a building or public space that’s inherently safe, we’re going to save so much money over so many years,” Ramsey said.

As Christchurch rebuilds its core, part of making people feel safe there has been involving people in the process.

A public consultation in the city of almost 350,000 people generated more than 100,000 individual responses.

While there will be some natural tension between popular opinion and the government’s priorities, Ramsey said knowing how people will use areas helps with making them safer.

A place filled with people simply enjoying a night out deters more unsavoury activity.

“It brings the natural guardians in and you won’t have to spend that money retrofitting,” Ramsey said.

For all its broad principles, CPTED also relies on the smaller details.

In Calgary, the East Village River Walk incorporates many CPTED features, including numerous benches and seats, bright night time lighting and emergency call boxes.

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