



Apartment Complex and Gated Communities:

Courtesy Officer vs. Police Officer

What's in a name?

Over the past several years there has been an increasing use of the title "Courtesy Officer" in apartment properties as opposed to some variation of "Security". This shift has been prompted by the (unfounded) belief that a job title change could reduce the property's liability and their tenant's expectations.

The problem lies in the fact that the Courtesy Officer is, by their very nature, a law enforcement officer who is there to provide security functions on the property. The courts tend to work quickly through the contentions of property management that no "security" is provided even though the primary job requirement of the courtesy officer is that they be currently employed as a police officer. The fact that they are also provided a reduced rent or rent free apartment in exchange for their services tends to highlight their real purpose.

Courtesy officers provide critical services to the tenants of their properties but the sufficiency of the security provided needs to be clearly reviewed. One officer cannot be on a property 24/7. For at least 40 hours a week, they are working their primary job which leaves gaps in property coverage. While it may be argued that during normal office hours that the staff and maintenance personnel on duty, they still do not possess the powers conveyed upon a police officer. Understanding crimes on the property will assist in creating the most impactful schedule.

Managing Courtesy Officers can be challenging because management assumes that since they are police, they naturally know what to do. That is correct in terms of law enforcement but, at least in an apartment setting, there may be other functions required as well as a different level of accountability. Accountability means that prior to hiring a particular officer, all of the job duties are outlined and agreed to. These should be reduced to writing and signed as part of the hiring process. A police officer may feel micro-managed because it is recommended that all activities are documented. To ensure the level of work is satisfactory, a daily report should be created to document that. Those should be turned into management daily. The types of tasks required may include listing all lights not working, or checking the pool area and laundry rooms. Whatever has been mandated by management must be completed the same as if they were an actual employee. If the officer is a "poor performer" then they can be released from their services and replaced.

In short, a Courtesy officer or security guard must have planned and documented tasks. Their function must be properly managed or the level of service desired will not be met.