

# Safe Growth America Checklist





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# Safe Growth America Checklist

The goal of APA's **Safe Growth America** initiative is to build environments that are safe for current and future generations of people and to protect structures, transportation and utility infrastructures, and the natural environment from damage. Damage may result from natural hazards, technological hazards, or other risk factors. Wise land-use and transportation decisions, adoption and enforcement of appropriate design standards, increased participation and accountability, and resource conservation may make development and redevelopment safer. The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), the professional institute of the American Planning Association (APA), prepared this **Safe Growth America Checklist** to facilitate discussion about safety and about actions that might enhance safety in a neighborhood.

## Directions

Use the questions in the checklist to examine the safety of your neighborhood. Be sure to consider conditions from the perspective of people who are the most vulnerable. Answer "Yes," "No," or "N/A (Not applicable)" to each question. Answering "no" identifies an unsafe condition. In addition to the questions posed, consider other factors that may be important to the safety of your particular neighborhood. Then, assess each risk and discuss possible activities that might be implemented to reduce the risk. Consider alternative strategies and select the best course of action for your neighborhood. After the best course of action has been implemented, monitor the progress that is made and modify your strategy accordingly.

## Additional Directions

If you are willing, please share your preliminary findings with the AICP office of APA. These may be submitted in any format that is convenient for you such as a fax of your checklist or an e-mail message that summarizes your findings. Please send your comments to us by:

Email: [aicp@planning.org](mailto:aicp@planning.org)

Fax: 202-872-0643

Mail: **AICP—Safe Growth America Checklist**  
1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036

From the information that is voluntarily reported to us, we will track the more common unsafe features of neighborhoods, the more dangerous or unusual situations reported, and the obstacles encountered in implementing plans to improve safety. We would appreciate the inclusion of your name and e-mail address or telephone number, which will be kept confidential, so that we may contact you should we need clarification. Your feedback will be used to improve the **Safe Growth America Checklist** and to provide real examples for educational purposes.

## Safe Growth for People



### Safe Growth for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Well-maintained, well-lit sidewalks and bike paths with good visibility and crosswalks help pedestrians and bicyclists avoid accidents and discourage crime. Shade provides protection from sun damage. Features that encourage pedestrian traffic and “eyes on the street” enhance the personal safety of all who use an area.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, consider repairing damage, repainting crosswalks, installing crossing lights, adding benches, removing graffiti, planting flowers and street trees, closing dead-end alleyways, enforcing no loitering laws, increasing police visibility, increasing the availability of public telephones, or taking actions that will increase pedestrian traffic and dog walking in the area.

For additional actions that contribute to safety in pedestrian areas, consult the Recreation, Environment, and Transportation sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Are sidewalks relatively smooth?			
Are sidewalks free of debris and obstructions?			
Are sidewalks wide enough for expected use?			
Are there sidewalks on both sides of the street?			
Are there ramps in sidewalks at corners and on medians?			
Is there shade to protect pedestrians from the sun?			
Are there places for pedestrians to sit and rest?			
Is drinking water available for bicyclists or pedestrians?			
Are there bike paths or bike lanes?			
Are bike paths/lanes relatively smooth?			
Are bike paths/lanes free of debris and obstructions?			
Are bike paths/lanes and sidewalks free of blind spots so that entering pedestrians, bicycles, or motor vehicles are visible?			
Are sidewalks and bike paths/lanes free of obstacles such as road signs?			
Do sidewalks or bike paths/lanes terminate logically?			
Are there crosswalks at intersections?			
Are crosswalks well marked?			
Are there crossing signals at busy intersections?			
Are there medians in the middles of wide streets?			
Is lighting along sidewalks adequate?			
Is the area free of solid walls that limit visibility?			
Are police officers available in the area?			
Are there telephones to make emergency calls?			
Is there either residential or commercial activity that provides "eyes on the street"?			

*What other characteristics of the area might affect the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists?*



## Safe Growth for Health

Food and shelter are basic needs and these are best met when people have access to good quality food and adequate, affordable housing. Access to high-quality facilities that provide care is necessary for young children and some elderly people. For the safety of some people in any community, it is important that a hospital or medical clinic be available and accessible. Promote physical health and mental health with places for social interaction, such as public meeting areas and parks, and places for recreation, such as walking paths, playgrounds, tot lots, and ball fields. For better health, insect and rodent populations must be controlled.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, programs and regulations that increase the availability of food and shelter to all members of a community and that provide safe access to care can be enacted and supported. Communities might work to improve existing recreation areas and to develop new areas on vacant property. Communities might enact and enforce regulations to limit standing water and better maintain stormwater drainage and to avoid the accumulation of trash and debris.

For additional actions that may contribute to the physical and mental health in a neighborhood, consult the Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Recreation, Transportation, and Community Design sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Are parks or play areas available?			
Are parks or play areas accessible?			
Are parks or play areas free of litter and debris?			
Are venues that sell high-quality food available?			
Are venues that sell high-quality food accessible?			
Are emergency medical services available?			
Are emergency medical services accessible?			
Is affordable housing available?			
Is housing in good condition?			
Are there services to assist those who live in poverty?			
Are there services for people who are homeless?			
Is care for elderly citizens available?			
Is care for elderly citizens accessible?			
Is care for elderly citizens affordable?			
Is childcare available?			
Is childcare accessible?			
Is childcare affordable?			
Is the area free of conditions that might encourage unwanted rodent populations?			
Is the area free of conditions that might encourage unwanted insect populations?			

*What other factors might contribute to the protection of physical and mental health?*



## Safe Growth for Motor Vehicle and Transit Riders

People at transit and school bus stops should be sheltered from traffic yet able to see what is going on around them. Traffic speeds should be reasonable, and, when applicable, snow, ice, and standing water should be removed from streets. Drivers should have an unobstructed view of traffic signs, other vehicles, and pedestrians in the area.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, erect bus shelters made of clear plastic or use a combination of traffic calming measures such as roadway narrowing, traffic circles, speed bumps, or barriers to reduce speeds. Improved road maintenance and increased vigilance of stormwater drainage may improve vehicle safety. Trimming trees and shrubbery may improve the ability of drivers to see potential hazards in the area.

For additional actions that may contribute to the safety of transit and motor vehicle drivers and passengers in a neighborhood, consult the Land Use, Economic Development, Transportation, and Community Design sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Are people at bus stops protected from moving traffic?			
Are people at bus stops protected from rain and wind?			
Are there benches for waiting transit users?			
Is there natural surveillance at bus stops?			
Are pull out lanes provided for buses when picking up or discharging passengers?			
Are walking routes to schools protected from traffic?			
Are school bus stops protected from traffic?			
Are drop-off locations at schools protected from traffic?			
Are markings in roads well maintained?			
Are road surfaces reasonably smooth?			
Are roads free of floodwaters during rainy weather?			
Are stormwater sewers free of debris?			
Are roads sanded/salted when icy?			
Are traffic speeds reasonable?			
Can drivers easily see signs?			
Can drivers easily see signal lights?			
Are evacuation routes well marked?			

*What other attributes of the area might affect the safety of transit and motor vehicle drivers and passengers?*

# Safe Growth for the Built Environment



## Safe Growth for Buildings

To keep people safe from loss of life or physical harm and to prevent disruption of lives and businesses, structures must be protected. Structures can be damaged by a variety of events including natural hazards. These hazards vary from one part of the country to another, but no area is exempt from such considerations.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, review the quality of building codes and the degree to which they are enforced. These may limit building damage from fire, high winds, wildfire, flooding, landslides, erosion, subsidence, and seismic activity. Mitigate the effects of wildfire by prohibiting accumulation of flammable brush and planting fire-resistant plant species. Safety may also be enhanced with early warning systems and emergency evacuation procedures that reflect current conditions.

For additional actions that may contribute to the safety of buildings, consult the Land Use, Natural Hazards, and Community Design sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Do the fire department or rescue services have ready access to buildings?			
Are fire hydrants available?			
Are fire hydrants accessible?			
Are all exits of buildings usable in case of fire?			
Have fire-resistant building materials been used?			
Are fire-resistant plant species used where there is risk of wildfire?			
Is the area free of accumulations of flammable debris?			
Are water heaters and furnaces strapped to walls where there is risk of earthquake?			
Are buildings elevated or flood proofed where there is risk of flooding?			
Does the community have a flood warning system?			
Does the community have a tornado warning system?			
Do buildings contain safe rooms where there is risk of tornado?			
Are buildings properly constructed and repaired to prevent damage due to high winds?			

*What other situations might affect the safety of buildings and their occupants?*



## Safe Growth for the Home and Workplace

People need safe environments in which to live and work. Healthy environments provide adequate heating and cooling, minimize exposure to harmful substances, and provide personal security.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, ensure proper maintenance of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. Control building temperatures and save energy by installing insulation in roof and walls and sealing leaks, using smaller windows and, in warm climates, building higher ceilings. Programs to remove asbestos, lead, or other harmful substances may be enacted when necessary. Security controls and increased police presence may be effective in enhancing personal security in residential and commercial environments. Safety is enhanced when adjacent land uses are compatible.

For additional actions that may contribute to safety in the home and workplace, consult the Land Use, Energy, Housing, and Community Design sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Do people know their neighbors, at least informally?			
Does the design of the community encourage neighborly activity, such as the provision of common gathering areas?			
Does the physical design of the neighborhood discourage burglary, assault, or other crimes?			
Are adjacent land uses compatible with the home or workplace?			
Are buildings adequately cooled in summer?			
Are buildings adequately heated in winter?			
Are buildings adequately ventilated?			
Do windows open to allow ventilation or escape?			
Are buildings insulated?			
Are children prevented from contact with lead-based paint?			
Are asbestos fibers properly contained?			
Are noxious odors absent from building interiors?			

*What other features might affect safety in the home and workplace?*



## Safe Growth for Public Facilities

The transportation, telecommunications, electric and natural gas, water, sanitary, and stormwater sewer systems are critical for the safety and health of residents in a community. The potential for service disruption because of poor maintenance, natural hazards, including snow, ice, wind, tornadoes, flooding, fire, landslides or erosion, or other threats must be minimized. The transportation infrastructure might be critical for evacuation of an endangered area if it is threatened. Boarded-up buildings and derelict lots provide opportunities for increased pest population and opportunities for crime.

To remedy unsatisfactory conditions, request that those authorized properly maintain roads and bridges, trim trees, replace damaged utility components, or bury utility lines. Consider structural controls, such as bollards, to minimize the vulnerability of the infrastructure to acts of terror. Ensure that community regulations to eliminate boarded-up buildings and to maintain vacant lots are enforced.

For additional actions that may contribute to the safety of public facilities in a neighborhood, consult the Transportation and Community Design sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Are sidewalks and entrances to public buildings well lit?			
Are sidewalks and entrances to public buildings accessible?			
Are dead tree limbs near sidewalks removed?			
Are dead tree limbs near utility lines removed?			
Are trees near utility lines trimmed as necessary?			
Are exits from public buildings well marked?			
Are exits from public buildings accessible?			
Are hallways adequately lit in public buildings?			
Are utility services (electric, gas, telephone) restored quickly when they fail?			
Is the sanitary sewer capacity sufficient to prevent overflow?			
Is the tap water of good quality?			

*What other circumstances might affect safety in and around public facilities?*

## Safe Growth for the Natural Environment



Susan Faulkner

When the natural environment is protected, current and future generations will be safer. This includes protecting the air, water, soil, and wildlife, and reducing the consumption of non-renewable sources of energy.

To protect and improve air quality, consider strict enforcement of emissions controls. Protect trees and plant new trees to enhance air quality and to reduce the amount of energy consumed to cool buildings. Ensure that measures to control stormwater runoff and maintain sanitary sewer systems are adopted. Soil can be protected with proper disposal of hazardous materials, organic farming and gardening methods, and recycling. Wildlife habitat, including food supplies and migration corridors, can be protected and restored to ensure that wildlife populations do not pose threats to motor vehicle, rail, and air transportation and for the safety of wildlife. Fossil fuel consumption can be minimized with efficient traffic signals, intelligent traffic management systems, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, provision of public transit and alternative transportation choices, or alternative power generation including solar, wind, and fuel cells for cars.

For additional actions that may contribute to the safety of the natural environment, consult the Land Use, Recreation, Energy, Environment, and Transportation sections of local comprehensive plans.

	Yes	No	N/A
Are alternative transportation choices provided to minimize reliance on automobiles?			
Are there provisions or incentives to use alternative power sources?			
Is the air clean?			
Is surface water clean?			
Is the ambient level of noise acceptable?			
Are toxic sites fenced to prevent entry?			
Are vacant lots free of broken glass and debris?			
Is the ground stabilized with plants to prevent erosion?			
Are buildings insulated to save heating and cooling costs?			
Are there trees to provide cooling to buildings in the summer?			
Are drivers encouraged to reduce gasoline consumption?			
Are drivers unlikely to encounter deer or other wildlife on roads?			

*What other aspects of the natural environment might affect the safety of residents of the area?*

## Next Steps



Plan to mitigate unsafe conditions that have been identified through this **Safe Growth America Checklist** as follows:

### First: Document your findings.

- What unsafe conditions prevail? For whom is each condition risky? What is the relative degree of risk?

### Second: Select a course of action.

- What alternative solutions are possible? Which approaches address the more critical situations? Which approaches are more likely to be successful? Which is the best approach to take?

### Third: Make and implement the plan.

- What activities will take place? Who is responsible for completing various activities? When will these activities occur?

### Fourth: Monitor the results.

- Was the plan effective? Efficient? Will you continue with this approach or modify it?

The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) would very much appreciate learning about your findings and your experience in assessing and improving the safety of your neighborhood. Please send us an update, report, synopsis, story, or reflection about your experience with this **Safe Growth America Checklist** by e-mail, [aicp@planning.org](mailto:aicp@planning.org); fax, 202-872-0643; or mail, AICP—**Safe Growth Checklist**, 1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. Thank you very much!

**BE SAFE!**