



Taking the Worry Out of Collisions— The Park-Kwik Example

By Jim Ryan

Historically, there have been two approaches to dealing with collision protection in parking structures. The most common approach has been to use metal structures usually made of steel. Often, steel angle iron is attached to square concrete columns. Other applications use steel bollards placed around objects to prevent collisions. These metal devices can help protect structures from collision impacts, which is no small matter if you consider the costs of roof and building repair that collisions sometimes entail. However, these metal protective devices do nothing to prevent scratches or dents on the vehicles themselves, and in some instances the space that they take up makes tight spaces even tighter.

Another approach has been to wrap some type of soft material around columns and corners in hopes of precluding scratches on cars as they navigate in tight spaces. Rubber has been used, but its success has often been short-lived because rubber materials

tend to capture grit and dirt and lose their scratch-prevention potential. Another common homegrown solution in many garages has been to wrap carpet around columns. While such homegrown solutions may lessen scratches, they are less successful preventing dents and do virtually nothing to protect the structural integrity of the building.

A new third approach that is now gaining in popularity is the strategic use of energy absorbing molded foam products that are precisely engineered in formulations with high impact absorption properties and designed for use in garages. Unlike the haphazard jerryrigged rubber or cloth protectors that some garages have used in the past, these highly engineered plastic foam energy absorbers are able to simultaneously protect structures and vehicles during collisions.

An example is a new Park-Kwik facility in downtown Brooklyn, N.Y. Park-Kwik, a subsidiary of Two Trees Management Company LLC, has recently revamped a historic New York City building into a luxury condominium space with a parking garage that is very tight but yet very safe. The building above this underground parking facility has been well-known to New Yorkers for generations. Referred to as “110 Livingston,” the building was originally built in 1925 to house the Benevolent Organization of Elks. In the latter part of the 20th century, it was the headquarters of New York City’s high profile Board of Education. Its boiler-jammed basement floor was never designed to be a parking garage, to say the least.

Ariel Azria, general manager of Two Trees’ Park-Kwik subsidiary, explains that on-site parking is integral to the value of the 300 residences above at 110 Livingston and the entire development project. Azria says that the energy absorbing products they use on concrete columns throughout the facility enable them to operate the garage without excessive worry of collision issues.

“There were two reasons for transforming the basement into a garage,” he says. “First, garages in New York are very financially rewarding, and it’s a good investment. Second, in New York as in many areas, whenever you do a condo conversion of an office building to residences, the zoning laws require that you somehow deal with adding parking. You don’t necessarily need to put the parking facility in the actual condo building, but it’s far easier if you do because you ultimately get more control over the facility.


“This is a valet parking facility for the residents who live above and also a public parking garage. It handles a combination of spaces that are leased on a monthly basis and those that are paid for by the hour. Every car is parked by an attendant and Park-Kwik is

very conscious of its liability if any of the cars are scratched or dented. Typically a car is about six feet wide and if you have two spaces next to each other, you want at least 16 feet for those two spaces. The basement's beam structure doesn't allow that, however, and at most we have 15 feet for those two spaces, and in some cases we have only an inch or two of space between a car and a supporting column structure.

"We also are required to spray all the steel I-beams with fire proofing. This fire proofing has a very unattractive appearance, somewhat like popcorn. We knew we wanted something that looked more professional, was pleasing to the eye, and also able to cushion the blows from any impact between cars and beams."

"I eventually found a product specifically geared for parking garages, instead of industrial warehouses and shelving units. We were thrilled to find impact absorbers that are flexible enough to wrap around the concrete pillars and columns throughout our basement structure.

"We have put these collision protectors to the test much more than we originally planned," Azria says. "We've had so much construction going on and we've had to move things like scissor lifts in and out of the garage, as well cars and trucks used by the construction workers. These energy absorbing collision protectors held up very well during very frequent impacts during the construction period."

Dealing with customer complaints about scratches and dents is no picnic. Having to do structural repairs to a facility because of repeated collisions is also a costly bother. Whether you are considering how to design a new parking facility or looking at ways to minimize collision costs to your operation, energy absorbing molded plastic protectors are a parking garage innovation that you should take the time to consider. 

Jim Ryan is general manager of Sentry Protection Products, makers of Concrete Wrap® for parking facilities and other collision protection products. He can be reached at jryan@sentrypro.com or by calling **1.888.265.8660**.



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