

Are you protecting your assets properly?

Contributed by Neil Walker, J Durrance & Co. Ltd, 2006

Close to one million incidents of criminal damage, theft and burglary against non-residential properties are reported annually. Neil Walker explains how a little planning, foresight and implementation of the right physical security measures could deter many of these offences before they have the opportunity to take place.

What assets on your premises do you consider valuable? Computers, equipment, items of stock, money... staff. All of these are valuable assets to a company. Let's face it, what would your company do without its computers? Struggle. How would you run if your stock had gone missing? With difficulty. Are you prepared to put your staff at unnecessary risk, especially if they are looking after money or high-value assets? Absolutely not.

Why do some companies put such little importance on security? Is it because they think they are saving money because it will never happen to them? Well, there are almost one million annually reported incidents of criminal damage, theft and burglary against non-residential properties. With unrelenting crime figures, it may not be long before you become a statistic.

Without one or any of their assets, business cannot run efficiently, costing time and money. If it's your responsibility to ensure the security and standard of facilities are maintained, it could be your neck on the line!

So why put assets at risk? Not to mention your neck! Security of facilities is about providing a safe, comfortable and unobtrusive environment for people to work in, without feeling threatened, and for visitors to attend without feeling victimised.

Why physical security - CCTV does the job Many companies like the thought of closed circuit television (CCTV, or spy camera) - that you can see and record what is going on. Many advocates to CCTV believe it's the answer to crime protection.

Even the British Government released another £79 million in January 2006 for the installation of CCTV more networks across the country. A Home Office document insists that this latest initiative in the "blitz on crime and disorder" will "enable thousands of cameras to be installed and target residential crime hotspots, high street shopping centres, public transport networks and car parks, and hospital sites, as well as the popular tourist attractions".

The UK already has more CCTV cameras per person than any other country. But let's take a step back. CCTV is great at monitoring. We've all seen TV footage where the most ridiculous crimes have been caught on camera. The fact is the crime still took place.

How about taking some basic preventative measures to stop the crime happening altogether? Physical security is designed to provide a more secure environment and a deterrent to would-be burglars. Let's not forget the fact that 80 per cent of all crime is committed by opportunists. If premises look more difficult to infiltrate and would take burglars too much time or make too much noise, they will move on to an easier, less secure target.

Roller shutters provide great protection against shop front and window entry, but need not look unattractive or cumbersome. Many different types of style and finish of roller shutter are available, including perforated or vision panels, so you can still see the shop window after hours. It is also possible to have fantastic and realistic imagery or branding on the front of the shutter that doesn't fade. This can make it visually appealing and still provide an active shop front when closed.

Something as simple as a five-lever mortice lock and hinge bolts on external doors would increase a door's security, preventing easy entry. These can be built into the push bar system in order to maintain fire exit regulations.

The physical construction of external doors and windows and the strength of their fixing to the building structure is just as important as the locking mechanisms. The best lock in the world is useless on a weak door or frame.

However, it is not simply the front and back door that provide burglars with opportunities. What about windows and skylights? Window locks with removable keys, collapsible gates, non-return screws on external fixings for vents and skylights: all can contribute to enhancing the overall security of a building, none of which need to be unsightly and all of which are cost-effective.

These measures need to be part of an overall security strategy on which the police, local council's security expert or physical security consultant can advise the best type of basic protection.

On the whole, improvements to physical building security will be the only feasible way to make trespass or entry more difficult.

The grounds

- Choose a good perimeter fence, such as palisade fencing. Avoid solid fences or walls, which reduce the opportunity for natural surveillance of the grounds by passing members of the public.
- Avoid ground cover or shrubbery over two feet high that may provide cover for intruders. Trees and telegraph poles next to the building can give access to windows and the roof.
- Fit vandal-resistant external lighting. All wiring should be encased and fittings located where they are least accessible. Entrances and other vulnerable areas should be lit.
- Car parks should be well lit and could include barriers control access to restrict unwanted vehicles, while bollards can stop unauthorised parking. Cyclists should be provided with secure parking facilities.
- Keep the grounds clean and tidy. Provide litter bins. If the grounds are well-maintained you will expect fewer unwelcome visitors.
- Consider the building's position in relation to its neighbours. Through routes from adjacent buildings into the library should be secured. Continuing on this theme, good security not only has the potential to reduce levels of crime such as burglary but also benefits for our fire service partners. A scheme known as Alleygators developed by the Metropolitan Police aims to 'gate off' alleyways that are often used by burglars to gain entry to the rear of premises. Not only has this approach reduced burglaries by up to 90 per cent in some areas, its use in Merseyside has also reduced the number of calls to secondary fires by up to 80 per cent, thereby providing a resource saving to the fire services.

The building (exterior)

- Doors with metal frames, hinged on the inside, provide the best protection. Avoid recessed doorways that provide dark corners where criminals can hide.
- At night-time, entrances can be secured with roller shutters that discretely hide away during opening hours.
- Rear or fire doors can be potentially easy access for burglars. Consider higher-rated security doors with push bars that meet fire and health and safety regulations.
- Ensure locks and locking mechanisms (interior and exterior) are appropriate to their situation and that they meet the standards required by your insurance company.
- Windows, skylights and fanlights should be barred or fitted with locks and the glass reinforced with security film (or replaced with laminated glass or similar).
- Graffiti can be discouraged by anti-graffiti coatings and easy-clean surfaces. A regular cleaning routine should be established.
- Drain pipes should be coated with anti-climb paint.
- Consider the installation of an alarm system connected to a National Approval Council for Security Systems (NACOSS) approved central station (this is the only method of guaranteeing a police response) or CCTV. The building (interior)
- Consider how easy it would be to gain unauthorised or undetected access or leave the building undetected. The layout of your building and access control is vital to its security.
- Prepare a plan of the building, identify blind spots and correct them - visibility is a golden rule of security!
- Keep the interior of your building tidy. It will present an image of care and supervision that the potential criminal will find off-putting. Access
- Control all entry/exit routes. Barriers or turnstile systems could assist here. If possible avoid narrow dual-purpose entrance/exit points. A crowd of people moving in all directions is ideal cover for a thief.
- Separate entry/exits are preferable. If possible, there should be only one exit. However, remember you will have to satisfy current health and safety and fire regulations.
- Fire exits should be fitted with a door-open alarm unit to alert staff.
- Avoid lifts and exits that give direct access to the street.
- The exit should be covered by an electronic article surveillance system and staffed at all times.
- Clear signage and rope barriers will help prevent members of the public wandering into areas that are out of bounds. Supervising the public
- The best crime prevention practice maximises natural surveillance. Staff desks should be placed in positions where they can observe the greatest possible area.
- Staff safety should also be considered. If they are handling cash or high-value goods, safe areas or anti-bandit screens should be considered.
- Look at the layout of communal areas. The pressure to achieve maximum shelf footage sometimes encourages the placing of stacks where they prevent a clear view by staff.
- Use convex wall mirrors to highlight dark corners.
- Glazed partitions in office areas will allow those inside to be visible to both staff and other users. Ensure windows and glass-panelled doors are not obscured by posters or other obstructions.
- Keep the public informed - it will win you important allies in the fight against crime. CCTV is a great complement to physical security, and can certainly assist in identifying the culprits - but usually after the crime has taken place. With a little planning and foresight, and the correct use of the right physical security solutions, many of these offences could be deterred before they have even been committed, reducing the risk to buildings, staff and the equipment they store.

Why wait? Why wait until it happens before doing something about security of your property? By then it's too late and your business could suffer. Although you can claim to some extent on your insurance, you've still lost valuable information, time, money and had masses of inconvenience. Your insurance premiums will also increase.

Having the right physical security solutions can provide an excellent deterrent and a high level of security for any

premises. This should be combined with the power of electronic security and CCTV to provide an all-inclusive security solution for your facilities.

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