



# Risk Management Considerations For Security Systems

The broad definition of a security system includes any various means or devices designed to guard persons and property against a wide range of hazards, including crime, fire, accidents, espionage, sabotage, subversion and attack.

The most common security systems are locks, whether they are simple mechanical door and window locking devices or complex electronic keypad or pass card systems. The advantages of lock security include cost (relatively inexpensive) and they are easy to use. One disadvantage is that locks only protect against unauthorized entry. Once the lock has been compromised, there is no warning that an event is in progress or has occurred.

Electronic burglar or intrusion alarm systems have become increasingly popular. These alarm systems consist of four components:

- 1. Alarm System Control Panel.** The control panel acts as the nerve centre of the security centre and can provide a direct link via phone line, cell phone connection or cable line to a monitoring service. The control panel contains the computer processor that connects all of the alarm system's components together. Most control panels are hard wired into the electrical system. In the event of a power failure, the control panel also contains a backup battery.
- 2. Alarm System Keypad.** The keypad is the direct link to the control panel and is utilized to arm or disarm the system. The keypad can also provide information on the status of the system. Most keypads have several panic buttons for police, fire or medical assistance.
- 3. Sensor Devices.** The sensor devices will send a signal to the control panel when an event occurs. These sensor devices vary widely, from simple magnetic switches and window foil to more sophisticated motion detectors, glass break sensors and infrared detectors.
- 4. Siren/Lights.** Once triggered, the security system will typically activate a siren and may also activate flashing outdoor lights. The system can also auto-dial any phone number for various alarm conditions.

The advantage of a monitored electronic security system is that notification is sent to a third party when the system has been triggered. With new technologies, the user can now monitor and control the system remotely. The disadvantage to electronic security systems is that they can be expensive and complex.

One common observation Frank Cowan Company Risk Inspectors make during site inspections is the use of "dummy" or fake video cameras. While these non-functioning surveillance cameras are fairly effective as a deterrent, in the event of an actual crime or emergency, they are completely useless.

Security systems, like any other type of equipment, require proper maintenance and testing. Often the system is allowed to become non-operational either through neglect or as a cost saving measure.

## Risk Management Considerations

- Is the security system adequately designed for the current occupancy?
- Is the security system Underwriter's Laboratories of Canada (ULC) listed?
- Does the security system have suitable supporting human resources in place?
- Is the security system monitored and is the monitoring station ULC listed?
- Who has access to keys and/or pass codes and how often are codes changed?
- Is there a policy or procedure in place for when an employee with access to keys or pass codes leaves their employment with the organization?
- Who responds to an alarm? Does the auto-dialer call the relevant authorities directly or are staff called first?

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