

SECURITY CHALLENGES



This month's question is: What do you see as the biggest security challenge for self-storage facilities today? — Poppy Behrens



Larry Easley • Storage Management Associates

Our biggest security challenge is dealing with the increase in break-ins and other acts of vandalism. The increase is, I believe, directly attributable to the economic situation everywhere. People are losing jobs and becoming desperate, and some who would never contemplate committing crime are left with few options. Having said that, we have to acknowledge that chain link fences are no challenge to a person wanting to gain access, nor are dummy cameras useful for more than a possible deterrent until it is discovered that they are indeed dummy cameras.

Facility owners who desire to put their best "security face" forward are those who use high-quality, full-color cameras and digital video recorders in combination with LCD monitors prominently displaying every possible aspect of the facility to assure customers and potential criminals that security is taken seriously. An owner who feels the cost of modern technological security surveillance systems is not justified will often be the owner whose property experiences the break-ins and other acts of vandalism. Facility managers must also be constantly vigilant in knowing their customers and who comes and goes.



Jeff Helgeson • 180 Development Services

Of the various potential security threats that are of concern to self-storage property owners and operators, I continue to feel that a storage facility's largest potential security challenge is internal from its own customers. The vast majority of all of our customers are fine upstanding citizens storing their personal property, though a minute percentage of storage customers are individuals looking for the right opportunity to burglarize another customer's storage unit. These seedy people are able to scout the property looking for security vulnerabilities, while also looking for units that contain valuable and sellable items.

Given this security risk, it is critical that the storage facility manager takes some fundamental security measures. These measures include gathering as much information on their customers as possible, selling high quality locks, being visible on the property, talking to their customers while out on the property, and doing daily lock checks. Other security measures that may be employed to thwart internal customer burglaries are security cameras and securing entrances to storage buildings with keypads.

As much as we would all like to prevent breaches in security, it is impossible to anticipate the creativity of criminals wanting to cause problems. Doing some of the little things goes a long way in prevention.



Buzz Victor • United Stor-All

So much has changed over the years in how the self-storage industry has addressed security issues. From the earliest days when the problem of break-ins was largely ignored, to today when electronic security systems are the norm, the industry has responded well to the break-in issue. Today's consumers know enough to ask about security and to seek properties that provide it, or they are willing to risk the consequences.

Still, circumstances in today's world and the realities of the economy may be changing what we think of as traditional self-storage security. In hard times, people do desperate things. We still have our alarm systems, but we may see more fraudulent reporting of missing property. We may see a rise in tenant-against-tenant theft. And we may see our managers placed in danger if self-storage property offices are discovered to be easy targets of robbers. Refresher courses for our managers about what to do in such circumstances may be in order. Being sure policy manuals are up to date may be helpful as well. Nor should we forget that our managers may find themselves in circumstances that cause them to act in ways that, in less stressful times, they would not. Loved ones may be out of work, facing the foreclosure issues that we read so much about. Facility performance may limit bonuses or raises. Although we want to believe the best about our employees, sometimes our trust is misplaced. It is especially important now that control systems are in place, audits are done regularly, and we do what is necessary to protect the security of our investment. ■

Do you have a question you'd like to see answered by industry experts? Please e-mail your questions to pbehrens@minico.com.