



In My Opinion

Viewpoint on Issues of Importance

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Video Surveillance

Public Safety vs. Investigative Support (or) Both

Over the last several years, I have seen a disturbing shift on large-scale design-build projects regarding video surveillance. Increasingly, there are integrated security system installations that include extensive video surveillance systems with hundreds of cameras installed both on the site grounds and building perimeter, as well as in key locations throughout the associated facility. So, what is wrong with that?

The concern that I have is related to the 'live monitoring' of the video surveillance systems. Increasingly, I am being faced with system design requirements where systems with extensive equipment are not, by design, intended to be live monitored. They increasingly will be spot monitored by centralized "command centres" that are performing this function for a number of facilities at the same time. When you consider each of the systems include hundreds of individual cameras, it is easy to understand that the live monitoring at these control centres will largely be restricted to alarm-triggered video views. With limited personnel at these monitoring locations, the ability to do proactive video monitoring is extremely unlikely.

In looking at guidance documents for industry segments, such as healthcare facilities, there appears to be support for the above methods and practices. This concerns me for one major reason. These systems are largely, by design, creating video surveillance systems that provide excellent evidence support for post-event investigations (by protective services groups or the police), but they do little to provide proactive public safety support to be able to discern developing situations of concern that may evolve into incivilities or crimes that could and should be responded to by on-site personnel. The key term here is PREVENTION.

I have been vocal in my queries on projects to determine how the installed systems support the person who finds themselves in an area of a property where they feel that their personal safety is at risk and they expect that someone is monitoring what is occurring in their location and sending protective personnel support. Having video surveillance systems that are not live monitored provides little deterrence value if crimes can be committed in a location and there is not timely response to the subject activities.

Does it not make sense that, if there is a facility where video surveillance is seen to be important enough to involve the installation of hundreds of cameras, that there be on-site personnel assigned to live monitor the system and perform video surveillance tours of the site and facility supporting and augmenting security foot patrols and situational responses. I suggest that it is the only way that makes sense on such sites.

I know that the counter arguments always come back to the ongoing operational cost limitations of having personnel perform these functions. It is often easier to gain capital budgets, especially on new builds, than it is to get ongoing operational budget commitments. However, is it not incumbent on the institutions to try and "prevent" the occurrence of incivilities and/or crimes?

In each of these large projects I have consulted in, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is increasingly being recognized as an important design consideration. This concept focuses on "crime prevention". So, when working on the physical environment for projects keeping crime prevention in focus, and then realizing that the video surveillance strategy more focuses on investigative support (which is a post incivility or crime posture), it comes across as contradictory. I believe there has to be a shift to realizing the importance of both, *in my opinion*.