Security systems for empty buildings

CFPA-E Guideline No 3:2010 S

CFPA EUROPE

Foreword

The Security Commission of the Confederation of Fire Protection Association Europe (CFPA-E) has developed common guidelines in order to achieve similar interpretation in the European countries and to give examples of acceptable solutions, concepts and models. The CFPA-E has the aim to facilitate and support fire protection and security aspects across Europe.

The market imposes new demands for quality and safety. Today fire protection and security aspects form an integral part of a modern strategy for survival and competitiveness.

The guidelines are primarily intended for the public. They are also aimed at the rescue services, consultants, safety companies and the like so that, in the course of their work, they may be able to help increase fire safety and security in society.

These guidelines have been compiled by the Guidelines Commission and are adopted by all fire associations in the CFPA-E.

These guidelines reflect best practice developed by the countries of CFPA-E. Where the guidelines and national requirements conflict, national requirements must apply.

Content

1 Introduction

This document provides guidance on the subject of electronic security systems for empty buildings to assist those considering installing such systems. It supplements the CFPA publication *Protection of Empty Buildings*, 02:2010/S*,* which provides comprehensive information regarding the problems often associated with empty buildings, together with guidance concerning possible safeguards. In order to set the scene for what follows, this current document briefly restates some of the principles outlined at greater length in *Protection of Empty Buildings.*

The appendix to this document outlines ideal specifications for temporary security systems. By way of clarification, and to avoid unnecessary repetition/qualification within the body of this document, the following terms are considered to mean:

- *owners* – those responsible for the empty building, this could include those who own the building, leaseholders, tenants, or managing agents and their staff
- *building(s)* – land and any structure/property built upon it, plus any contents within
- *empty building(s)* – buildings that, to all intents and purposes, are not being used as a workplace, store or as accommodation.

2 Why Electronic Security?

Empty buildings are prone to various common problems, such as deterioration of the fabric, damp, escape of water, fly-tipping, fly-posting and external vandalism etc. Many of these problems can be eliminated or reduced by good management, including regular inspections and appropriate maintenance and repair. However, empty buildings are often additionally at risk of being accessed by trespassers or intruders for various activities, such as squatting, illegal trading (including drugs), parties, internal vandalism and theft of contents or fixtures and fittings. There may also be a significant risk of partial or complete destruction by fire, particularly as a result of arson.

Physical security is often put in place to deter or hinder unauthorised access, but this may not be practical or sufficient in every case to prevent intruders gaining access. Therefore, some means of alerting the owners to unauthorised access will often be necessary to fully manage the risks mentioned above. This usually involves the use of an intruder alarm system although sometimes a remotely monitored video surveillance system (VSS) may also prove suitable.

3 Intruder Alarm Systems

Intruder alarm systems can be considered under two headings, namely ‘conventional’ and ‘temporary’ alarm systems.

3.1 Conventional Intruder Alarm Systems

Many buildings in normal use are fitted with a permanently installed, mains-powered, internal intruder alarm system. To install such an alarm system in a building once it is empty can involve considerable expense and delay. Therefore, wherever possible, as a building becomes vacant, any existing alarm system should be formally taken over by the new owners and maintained/upgraded as appropriate to provide ongoing intruder detection.

Conventional alarm systems are usually installed, maintained and monitored by installing companies and alarm receiving centres (ARCs) that have been third-party certificated by an inspection organisation. This certification is usually supported by insurers and other interested bodies, including the police, as a means of ensuring that relevant national and European standards are complied with for alarm system design, maintenance, ARC monitoring, security procedures, record keeping and staff security vetting.

Indeed it may be the case that police rules require independent certification of the installation company, maintenance company and/or monitoring company if the system is to be eligible for a routine emergency police response to activations.

Regardless of whether a system qualifies for police response, it is essential to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to respond to any alarm faults/activations by the appointment of suitable in-house keyholders or commercial premises keyholders (a security company). For further guidance on the appointment of keyholders, please refer to the CFPA document *Guidance on Keyholder Selection and Duties, 4:2010/S.*

3.2 Temporary Intruder Alarm Systems

Where an empty building has no alarm system, or it proves impractical to take over and use an existing system – for example, if previous owners have removed or damaged components, or the necessary mains power supply is no longer available – it is often possible to install a temporary alarm unit or system.

Temporary alarm systems usually comprise a portable control/power unit and various wire-free intruder alarm sensors, although some use various forms of audio or visual detection and/or verification. Fire detection sensors can be added to some systems. Temporary alarms are designed to be powered by a battery, although mains power can sometimes be utilised, if present on site. Low battery power indications are usually sent to the ARC.

Most systems provide silent or covert notification of activations to an ARC via the mobile phone (global system for mobile communications (GSM)) network, but some have an option to use additional on-site sirens/sounders. Some products can also send periodic test calls to and from the site to check the operational status of the system and the means of notification.

It may be that there is a wide variety of specialist companies providing temporary alarm products/services locally but there are few relevant standards that specifically apply to such systems. Consequently the sector is not as well regulated as the conventional alarm system market.

Befor ordering a temporary intruder alarm system it should be checked if national regulations are given and if so if these regulation fit the requirements of the interested parties.

Owners and insurers need to establish what action is taken when a temporary alarm system activates. These systems are unlikely to qualify for a routine emergency police response even where such a response is available to conventional alarm systems. Some system providers undertake to telephone the local police via normal telephone lines to alert them to alarm activations, but this practice may not be acceptable to the police in which case owners must put in place adequate and reliable arrangements for private or commercial keyholders (i.e. a security company) to attend the site to investigate or rectify the cause of any alarm activation or fault.

If arrangements are made for owners' own keyholders to attend activations, they should be cautioned to do so with due regard for their safety, and advised to:

- attend in pairs
- let someone know where they are going and when they can be expected to make contact/return
- carry mobile phones
- be aware that if there are signs of a break-in, or suspicion that intruders are present, they should call for police assistance via the emergency telephone service.

Many commercial security companies provide a response and keyholding service and building owners often choose to employ such services to avoid some of the difficulties that can arise with the use of in-house keyholders. Again, the CFPA publication, *Guidance on Keyholder Selection and Duties,* provides further information and advice. Owners should ensure that any company employed to provide such a service meets with the full approval of their insurers.

Appendix to this document provides a checklist of useful characteristics of temporary intruder alarm systems. While temporary alarms are a cost-effective and proven way of providing protection against intrusion into empty buildings, their effectiveness will depend on many factors. Owners should therefore satisfy themselves as to the suitability and effectiveness of any system under consideration by comparing the system to the checklist given in the Appendix.

4 Video Surveillance Systems (VSS)

VSS takes many forms, but to be effective, a system needs to be monitored so that unauthorised persons approaching or entering the building may be challenged and/or a keyholder or response service dispatched to attend.

VSS can be considered under two headings, ‘conventional’ and ‘temporary’.

4.1 Conventional VSS

The cost of installing a new, conventional, monitored VSS to protect an empty building, particularly for a short period, will usually be prohibitive. However, in some cases it may be possible to take over a system which has already been installed in the building, or to arrange for a system covering an adjacent site/public space, such as a town or shopping centre system, to monitor the empty building.

The complexity of conventional VSS is such that they should only be assumed to be effective where installed, maintained and monitored by companies that have been third-party certificated by an inspection organisation, assuming a certification scheme is available. As with intruder alarm systems, this certification is generally supported by insurers and other interested bodies, usually including the police, as a means of ensuring that relevant standards are complied with for system design, maintenance, monitoring, security procedures, record-keeping and staff security vetting. Existing systems without such certification should be evaluated by a reputable consultant to establish if cost effective action is feasible and desirable to optimise their potential.

4.2 Temporary VSS

If arrangements cannot be made for a suitable existing system to monitor the empty building, a temporary VSS system may be the only cost-effective solution if visual evidence of activities at an empty building is required. Devices are currently available which consist of an enclosure housing a battery power supply, passive infrared movement detector, camera with infra-red illumination, GSM unit and a key switch.

A few specialist companies can provide temporary VSS products/services. Again, as with temporary alarm systems, there are few relevant standards that specifically apply to such systems. Consequently the sector is not well regulated, if at all.

Some providers undertake to telephone the local police via normal telephone lines to alert them to visually verified system activations. The chances of this resulting in a police response are increased if the monitoring operation can persuade the police operator that a criminal act has taken place or is likely to take place. Note, however that in many localities, trespass is regarded as a civil, rather than criminal, offence.

As with temporary intruder alarm systems, it is essential that owners put in place adequate and reliable arrangements for private or commercial keyholders to attend the VSS protected site to investigate or rectify the cause of any system activation or fault.

5 Conclusion

Wherever practical, it will usually be preferable to utilise or adapt an existing conventional electronic security system for the monitoring of an empty building. However, where this cannot be achieved, temporary electronic security systems can be an effective means of monitoring, particularly when coupled with appropriate physical security measures and suitable deterrent warning signs on site.

The main advantages of installing a temporary electronic security system compared with a conventional system are:

- speed of installation
- no requirement for mains power
- no requirement for a telephone line
- reduced costs – temporary systems are usually hired by the week/month

- ease of relocating units/detectors as a result of wire-free technology
- commercial providers can provide services such as response to system activations, regular site inspections, waste clearance and boarding-up services etc.

There are a number of companies that specialise in the provision of site surveys, installation, maintenance, monitoring and response to temporary electronic security systems in vacant buildings. While most of these companies do not meet all of the traditional standards/inspection body 'benchmarks' familiar in the field of conventional electronic security systems, most are dealing with the specific issues relating to the protection of vacant property on a daily basis. They are therefore likely to have the expertise and resources available to adequately deal with most problems encountered.

Appendix A Checklists

Temporary security systems: owners' checklist

When choosing a temporary security system, owners should consider the following issues. They should also seek advice/approval from their insurer.

Building/design issues

- Does the system under consideration provide the required level of alarm/VSS protection?
- Are the areas requiring protection suited to the proposed detection, i.e. free from undue vibration, vermin and birds etc that are likely to cause false alarms?
- Does the system provide the required number of control units/detection devices necessary to protect the building?
- Can control unit(s) be sited within an alarm-protected and/or a secure area?

System providers/installers

- Does the system provider carry out installation rather than subcontracting installation to another company?
- Do the installers have any third-party inspectorate certification or otherwise operate to relevant standards?

System equipment

- Can the control unit be physically fixed in place?
- Is the control unit strong enough to be likely to resist physical attack while sending any system activation message to the ARC?
- Is the expected battery life of the control unit at least 3 months?
- Will detection devices send low battery power signals to the control unit?
- Will the control unit send low battery power signals to the ARC?
- Will a record of alarm setting/unsetting and activations be captured at the ARC or in the site control unit?
- What maintenance checks are advised?

Alarm notification (signalling)

- Will a reputable company be acting as the monitoring centre for the system?
- Does the monitoring centre operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year?
- Does the monitoring centre have any third-party inspectorate certification or otherwise operate to a relevant standard?
- Can test calls be sent between the control unit and the monitoring centre, and will these be sent with sufficient frequency?

Response

- Can suitable arrangements be made for premises keyholders to be notified of and respond to any activations/faults?
- If a commercial response and keyholding company will be used, does the company hold third-party inspectorate certification or otherwise operate to a relevant standard?
- If a commercial response/guarding service will be employed, is the providing company listed as an approved contractor by the relevant regulating organisation?
- Are any response times for the commercial response keyholding service guaranteed?