



Crime Prevention Fact Sheet

“Security Awareness”

Reducing Criminal Opportunity

August 2008



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It is estimated that businesses across the country will spend \$61 billion on security this year. Most of that money probably will be spent on cameras, access control and IT intrusion systems. The question is, how much of that money will be spent on training employees on the various aspects of the security program? Are organizations taking the time to raise awareness in order to help supplement the basic elements of their security program?

American Society for Industrial Security International defines “security awareness” as:

... a state of mind when you're conscious of an existing security program and its relevance to your behavior, as well as the effect of your behavior on reducing security risks. The definition emphasizes security awareness as part of a conscious process, i.e., it is a continuing attitude that can move the individual to specific actions to decrease or otherwise report security risks.

The purchase of security hardware and the hiring of security officers may be subconsciously interpreted by employees as a transfer of security responsibilities to a small group within the organization. Rather than see themselves as a vital part of keeping the workplace safe, employees may begin to believe that cameras, access cards, security guards, etc., will be responsible for any problems that arise.



The security system equation is not complete without awareness training for all employees. By implementing ongoing security awareness training, every employee becomes a “security guard” of sorts for the organization. Security awareness training is important for the following reasons:

Employee misconceptions: Many employees may not be aware of their responsibilities under the security program. Far too many employees assume the responsibility of security is that of management. Instead, employees need to know that the largest share of security responsibility lies with them. They are the eyes and ears of the organization, most likely to spot suspicious activity or trouble long before security or management. Employees should be encouraged to call or report matters of a suspicious or dangerous nature.

Terrorism: Another reason for a security awareness program is the threat of terrorism. The threat of terrorism has citizens looking to the government for secure solutions. Yet, even the government recognizes its need for the citizens to interact with them. They clearly identify each citizen's role in the National Strategy for Homeland Security:

All of us have a key role to play in America's war on terrorism. Terrorists may live and travel among us and attack our homes and our places of business, governance, and recreation. In order to defeat an enemy who uses our very way of life as a weapon—who takes advantage of our freedoms and liberties—every American must be willing to do his or her part to protect our homeland.

Regardless of the size or scope of the organization, security is the responsibility of everyone.

Policy and procedures: A lack of knowledge on policy and procedures by many members within an organization is yet another reason why many security programs are compromised. An awareness session provides management an opportunity to review the policies and procedures of the organization with the employees. It establishes a commitment to the program. In their book Management of Information Security, Michael Whitman and Herbert Mattord write:



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“Employee accountability is necessary to ensure that the acts of an individual do not threaten the long-term viability of the entire company. When employees recognize that the organization protects itself by enforcing accountability, they will be less likely to view these programs as punitive. In fact, when an organization does not enforce accountability, it increases their risk of incurring a substantial loss that might cause it to go out of business, putting the entire workforce out of jobs.”

Security practitioners cannot assume all employees actively participate or understand their role within the security program. The awareness session allows for open discussion and an opportunity to ask questions that may not have been asked if it had not been discussed.

Understanding existing laws: Security awareness provides an opportunity to discuss existing laws. Organizations continually express a fear of violating someone’s privacy rights if they report suspicious or unusual behavior. Misconceptions about these laws must be discussed and thoroughly understood.

There are two laws that generate the most anxiety for individuals in the workplace: the American with Disabilities Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The intent of both laws is to protect the confidential information pertaining to medical conditions of an employee. However, neither law protects potentially violent or threatening behavior. Both laws have exemptions addressing potentially violent behavior.

Exemptions under these laws can be discussed and clarified with employees and management so everyone is more confident about reporting threatening or potentially violent behavior. The vast majority of workplace violence incidents do not occur without some warning, but they build over a period of time. It is at this time that employees play a crucial role in the recognition and mitigation of such risks.

The overall intent of a security awareness program is to combine education with training to impact the behavior of employees at the workplace. Behavior modification can only occur when all members of the organization understand their role. Awareness is the foundation which compliments the existing security program.

The Overland Park Police Department’s Community Policing Unit offers a “Security Awareness” session to businesses and organizations within its city limits. You may make a request for a presentation by going to the Police Department’s Web page at:

http://www.opkansas.org/Res/Police_and_Fire/Police_Department/Speaker_Request/index.cfm