



IACP-PSLC

VIDEO VERIFICATION WHITE PAPER

Rev 09/04/2008

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INTRODUCTION:

Over the last decade the use of video equipment has had a huge impact on society as well as the electronic security industry. From the London Subway bombers to the seemingly daily robbery events documented by video equipment it is clear that the use of video has earned a permanent place in the overall scope of electronic security. In fact both law enforcement and the public have almost come to expect video documentation of every event and crime and while video has many viable applications it is not the complete solution to reducing alarm dispatches. This document will explore the very narrow scope of video monitoring as one of many tools to reduce dispatch requests to burglar alarm systems.

ISSUE:

The issue of alarm dispatch requests continues to be a national concern for the law enforcement community. In spite of the fact that over 75% of all dispatch requests are the result of user error, it is the responsibility of the public and private sectors to explore every possible reduction method and examine the viability of all technologies and procedures. Recently a handful of law enforcement agencies have considered the use of remotely monitored video as a requirement to elicit response to a burglar alarm signal.

This document will detail why this technology is not well suited at this time to provide any measurable or effective results in dispatch reduction when applied globally and therefore should not be required in an alarm ordinance as a prerequisite for a dispatch.

AUTHORITY:

The IACP – Private Sector Liaison Committee comprised of seasoned members of both law enforcement and the alarm industry have for years studied the effectiveness of alarm reductions methods and programs. The diversity of PSLC members allows for input and review from nearly all aspects of the public and private sectors, yielding a balanced and effective perspective on alarm dispatch reduction.

Why not video monitoring as a global solution?

- 1. Criminal Intent/Activity** – Law Enforcement agencies would prefer to know there is actual criminal activity taking place prior to committing resources, some believe this should be a prerequisite for an alarm dispatch. If these transmitted images do not show an obvious criminal event in progress the standard verification process of calling the premises and authorized key holders must still be undertaken.

Simply stated, the fact that there is a person on the video screen does not establish criminal intent or activity, it is common for authorized users to be on site, regardless of the state of the alarm system – sometimes they just forget to turn the alarm system off.

Video monitoring typically transmits a series of still pictures or a short burst of video frames to an offsite monitoring provider. With over 75% of all alarm events being the result of user error these events will rarely be resolved solely by a few images viewed by alarm monitoring personnel at an off site location.

- 2. Camera Placement/Standards** - There is no standard on how much equipment constitutes an effective video monitoring system. While a single camera may be adequate for a small one-room retail location, there are locations with multiple rooms, or many thousands of square feet of warehouse or office space which would require substantial camera placement. Should each point of perimeter and interior protection on a security

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alarm system also be covered by a camera, and exactly what will be learned by having a camera in each of these locations?

The same applies to residential applications – one or two cameras in common areas or one in every perimeter room which would include bedrooms? Unlikely! Yet a requirement for “video verification” before dispatch might require such placement. It is not unusual for a burglar to break into a master bedroom and exit quickly without roaming the entire home. A one or two camera placement may not guarantee a picture confirming an intruder or criminal activity.

- 3. Cost: Citizens/Users** - Video equipment steadily decreases in cost and increases in dependability, however there remains additional expenses to install, monitor and service video monitoring systems that is above the cost incurred installing an alarm system. Recognizing that 90% of the active systems are not part of the alarm dispatch problem, requiring all systems to be upgraded to include the video monitoring component places an unnecessary financial burden on all but the wealthiest alarm users, especially since the technology continues to evolve and better equipment will continue to be developed.

If law enforcement is led to believe that video verification is a solution to the dispatch issue and we in turn require this additional technology in order to elicit a response, the legacy of millions of existing systems without the video monitoring technology may be required to comply even though they may not be a part of the problem.

- 4. Monitoring Centers Standards:** Technologically speaking there is no standard that the video monitoring facility can rely upon to cover all systems. In fact, virtually each manufacturer has unique and proprietary requirements in order to deploy any single manufacturer’s product. Additionally, there are no standards or industry procedures/guidelines for operators to interpret video signals they receive. Resolution/image issues can make decisions on determining unauthorized intrusions or criminal activity very difficult to ascertain.
- 5. Legal/Privacy Concerns:** Unlike many countries, the United States has right to privacy issues that must be recognized prior to giving a green light to any technology that may violate this very basic right. Recently in Richmond, California the American Civil Liberties Union challenged the use of video monitoring in high crime areas based solely on this right to privacy. While it is not anticipated that the ACLU will prevail in this effort it does bring up interesting issues as to the privacy issue. Even in London, England the city with the most aggressive video monitoring program in the world, they have had to address this concern through the use of elaborate software that prevents those controlling video cameras in public places from peering into private spaces.

CONCLUSION:

While there are a multitude of positive applications for video surveillance, and though it may be useful in selective alarm system accounts, it is not effective enough in most scenarios at this time to use as a global dispatch reduction tool, and not recommended as a requirement for police dispatch.

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