

Thieves around Europe are increasingly targeting warehouses and distribution vehicles as easy sources of lucrative goods. So what can you do to make sure your warehouse isn't their next port of call?

Site security

Crime is a fact of modern life – but that doesn't mean you have to just sit there and take it.

Warehouses are, by their very nature, often situated in remote locations and are frequently deserted during the hours of darkness. They are also, of course, full of goods – and therefore a tempting proposition to any determined thief.

Despite this, it seems warehouse security is often an afterthought at many firms. But it doesn't have to be that way. So what are the main areas to look at?

Perhaps the first thing to do in looking at the problem is just that – take a proper look at it. A site security survey, whether you carry it out yourself or call in a professional, will help highlight any areas of potential weakness in your security arrangements and dealing with those areas will inevitably make life much harder for criminals.



Surveying your site

Surveys should start with a thorough preparation phase, in which you sit down and work out what you will cover in the survey. This will involve assessing the risk of crime in your local area, the types of crimes that have already occurred in the region at other warehouses, the possible specific targets in your business, and the effects of any crime against those targets.

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When you start to survey a site, you should start from the outer environment and gradually work your way in. What is the immediate area around your site like, for instance? Can criminals approach unnoticed? Is there any CCTV outside your site and if not, could you and other nearby buildings share the costs of putting it in?

Working inwards, the next area to focus on is your site perimeter itself. What site boundaries do you have? Are any fences, gates or walls sufficient to keep criminals out? Can they be easily climbed or breached? Are there particular areas that are poorly lit at night? And do you have a manned gatehouse to control access?

Next, move on to the building shell, including walls, windows, doors, skylights and roof, asking yourself how you might break in if you were a criminal. Are all the doors always secured? Do windows or skylights often get



left open? Are there likely to be tools sitting around in your yard – like a stray forklift – that criminals could use to break into the building? And what about the building fabric itself? Does the material it is made of provide sufficient security? Are there any gaps which a burglar could use to prise open part of the building? Are the loading bay openings secure? Are all locks in good working order?

You also need to have a think about how you leave things inside the building, of course. For a start, you can keep records of the serial or model numbers of valuable assets – computers and mobile phones, for example. You might want to think about security-marking such items too.

In terms of the stock you hold, too, there are a number of simple steps you can take to keep things more secure. First off, of course, you should keep full records of any stock. You should also try and keep stock as far away as possible from the doors, especially valuable stock. If you have particularly valuable stock, you might also want to house it in a locked, caged security area within the warehouse.

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There are many measures you can deploy to help address any physical weak spots your survey identifies. These range from anti-ram-raid bollards to improved lighting and from CCTV systems to full alarm systems. →

Main image. CCTV can help you monitor both internal and external areas of your distribution centre
2. Controlling access to your site is another key area of security



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Access control

Site security isn't just about deterring criminals from physically breaking in when you're not there, however – increasingly, criminals often walk right into the area unnoticed or just unchallenged. To help combat this, you should ensure your warehouse is a restricted area that only authorised persons can access. One way of doing this is to introduce employee identification cards that should be worn by legitimate staff at all times. You also need to have a policy about anyone found in the warehouse without authority and ensure your staff are all fully aware of what they should do in such instances.

During the working day, keep any doors giving access to the warehouse closed and secured, even loading bays unless they are actually being used to load or unload vehicles. It's very easy for someone to jump up onto a loading dock when nobody's looking and make off with a couple of armfuls of goods and even if they don't, leaving the bay doors open can allow them to 'case' your site for later, working out where inside the building the most valuable goods are kept, for example, or how many employees might be present at any given time of day.

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You'll also want to have a think about the way you deal with visitors to your site. Make sure all visitors sign into a proper register when they arrive and are given a numbered and dated visitor's pass to wear, and that other key visitor details, like the purpose of their visit and the registration of any vehicle they arrive in, are recorded.

Where visitors are goods vehicle drivers, make sure they really are who they say they are: check any paperwork over carefully and if you're in any doubt, call the company that's supposedly sent them to ensure this really is the driver and vehicle they dispatched to you.

It can also be a good idea to take a photocopy of any driver identification they can provide, too. If you and your staff are in any doubt about the person collecting the goods, don't dispatch them.

To stop visiting vehicle drivers wandering around sensitive areas of your site, meanwhile, you could zone off the dispatch area so that people delivering or picking up only have access to, say, the main gate, the loading bay and toilet facilities.

Staff checks

Bear in mind, also, that the enemy doesn't always come from the outside and checking your own staff properly can make a major impact on any losses you may be suffering.

To help avoid petty pilfering by staff, you might consider deploying an internal CCTV system and talking to your human resources department about how to introduce random staff searches, if you feel it necessary. You might also consider introducing stricter disciplinary procedures to deal with any incidences of staff theft – and make sure all your staff know about any new measures you introduce. If you've got particularly high value goods on site that can easily be concealed, meanwhile, you should consider keeping them in a locked, caged off area and restricting access to certain staff only. Finally, of course, if the products you are handling happen to contain any radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, you might think about installing RFID readers in all the doorways of your building so you know when such goods are going walkabout unexpectedly.

A key issue with staff is also to vet them properly when you take them on, of course. Make sure you get references for any new staff you are about to employ and follow those references up. Be particularly careful to check whether they have any criminal convictions or impending prosecutions, too – you'll certainly want to know if someone you are thinking of employing already has a criminal record of some sort, especially if it's for burglary. Check any gaps in their employment records as thoroughly as possible.

In some countries – the UK for example – employers can check the criminal record

of prospective employees with the police. This will almost certainly involve getting the employee to sign a data protection waiver form of some sort and will also take a few weeks to process, but can still be worthwhile as it will give you complete peace of mind about new employees. If you make it a condition of their employment that they sign the waiver form, you'll also get an early indication of matters as it's likely that only those with a conviction will object.

Once new employees start work, keep an eye on them. Remember, it's not unknown for criminal gangs to infiltrate an organisation they are thinking of targeting by getting one of their number to apply for a legitimate job there, sometimes staying 'under cover' and working diligently for weeks or even months to gather intelligence before any actual crime is carried out.

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Be particularly careful with any temporary or agency staff on your site. Do you really know anything about their background? Has the agency you got them from really carried out proper checks into their history? And have you used the agency before – are you really sure they themselves are reputable?

Goods vehicle security

A final area to keep in mind is that of goods vehicle security. There's no point in making your warehouse as secure as a fortress if you're going to leave eight lorries stuffed full of cigarettes and alcohol in the yard over a weekend, for instance. You may be tempted to load goods vehicles at night that are making a very early start the next day, but a vehicle left in a deserted yard overnight is an easy target for thieves, who can either break into the load area to take what they want or just drive the whole truck away, whichever they prefer.

Wherever possible, load vehicles just before they depart only. And don't think it makes any

difference if you're just leaving loaded trailers out in your yard, rather than entire vehicles – thieves are more than capable of driving up in a tractive unit of their own to take a stray trailer away.

Be aware also of the danger to goods vehicles just outside your premises. One popular trick criminals employ is to flag down a lorry that's about to turn into your site to make a delivery and tell the driver that because of congestion in the yard, he should drop his trailer just around the corner instead. Needless to say, such trailers are rarely ever seen again...

Staying sharp

This might all sound like rather a lot of work when you're already busy running the warehouse, meeting tight deadlines and bearing all your health and safety commitments in mind. But if you want to minimise your firm's exposure to criminals, you should make site security one of your top priorities – and keep it there.

There may, up to now, have been more crime targeted at goods vehicles out on the road than at warehouses themselves, but as more and more firms have wised up to these dangers and made their goods vehicles and drivers more secure, so more and more criminals have begun to realise that in many cases, the warehouse is now the weakest link in the chain. Don't make life easy for them! ■

3. Check that outer doors are always closed and locked when they should be...
4. If you have installed CCTV, make sure someone is always there to monitor it

