

## Are You at Risk?

by Tom Lekan, Certified Protection Professional, the Atlantis Company

“Am I at risk?” Building owners and managers often ask themselves this question, and variations of this question are asked by corporate legal, security, insurance executives, and others. “Are we at risk?” It’s easy to understand why this question continues to nag us. Many of us have been through litigation after something terrible or tragic happened at a place or property we were responsible for. Looking back on the incident, we added up the cost for lawyers, settlements, the time we spent giving statements and depositions, etc. Only then did we realize it would have been far less expensive if we would have hardened our defenses in the first place. Many times it is not that we neglected to install a security or safety feature, only that we didn’t make sure it worked or was installed correctly or was *still* working. These cases are numerous. All too often someone changed or “modified” a device for the sake of convenience, a change that the owner or manager was unaware of until the tragedy happened. Too late.

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Reading this, you might find yourself saying, “I’ve been there.”

If so, you also may have sworn that you would never let that happen again, and meant it when you said it. Then time goes by, you have a multitude of things to deal with, and pressing issues force your attention elsewhere. You get bogged down. It’s at this very point that you again become vulnerable, exposed to liability, your assets at great risk, which you never intended.

Certainly you want safety and security methods and procedures in place for many good reasons, and there are benefits. However, we are all subject to the same constraints about money, and the ability to do the things people tell us that will help make our property safer. But we also shudder when we think of how much money was spent after a tragedy. The loss can be huge, and devastating. Just thinking of it sometimes is like opening a wound or a floodgate, the image of precious dollars and resources floating away in a judgment to a plaintiff. Sometimes these losses are so extreme they can cost a person their job, or you can find yourself in court charged with negligence and possibly a criminal offense. It’s a nightmare. The thoughts are nagging and persistent.

Stop! This is a depressing picture. Is there a bright side? Are there good solutions to mitigate risk, to worry less, sleep better, while you get more mileage from the money you’re spending on security and safety? Yes.



Basic methods you can use to protect yourself and reduce your exposure to risk:

◆ **Risk Assessment:** Perform a risk assessment with the same mindset as you would perform a financial audit – complete, detailed, accurate. You can perform these audits and assessments yourself, with a team, or with outside or professional help. Just do them.

◆ **Schedule Regular Audits:** A key is to perform security audits regularly, completely. Put them into the calendar and the schedule. Regular performance without fail is itself a protection. Document them.

◆ **Record Functions & Performance:** During your assessment make sure every device, procedure, or function is

doing what it was intended for. Document performance. For example, I have seen far too many closed circuit TV camera installations that had the best of intentions, but the cameras “looked” at the wrong areas, the picture too far away or not wide enough, or sometimes they were never “aimed” in the first place. Procedures that are out of date or incorrect are most damaging; they can make the difference in winning or losing a case. Procedures that are in place but not followed are the same.

◆ **Actively Plan & Budget:** Plan for correcting any of your negative findings through your capital budgeting process so that you are progressing with security and safety matters. You shouldn’t go bankrupt in order to cover every potential hazard. Documenting your plan and intentions are, therefore, important. And it is important for you to utilize precious dollars wisely like an investment. What I find more often than not is that good money was spent for inadequate or oversold countermeasures. Having a solid plan for the right security and safety measures after a complete assessment can make your capital go further. In some cases you will find a good procedure can be better than a hardware device, and in some cases a strategically placed camera can replace a person permanently.

◆ **Staff Training:** Train your staff in the latest and best practices in security and safety, document the training, and survey and measure it. At one of my prior security positions the turnover was heavy, but fire safety and security was paramount, I had my security staff do one-on-one audits with staff – they did these “on the fly”

and documented them. Simple questions like, “What would you do if you saw smoke? A fire? If you saw someone acting suspiciously or looked like they didn’t belong here?” The results of these were tallied, and the results let us know when, where, and with whom training was needed. The cost was simply the form used to document the training. Is this important? “What training do you provide...?” will be one of the first questions asked by your attorney when something goes wrong. You just can’t say that you did it or that training was provided. It must be documented thoroughly, undeniably.

In summary, we all have responsibility for the safety and security of the people at our properties. With responsibility comes accountability - the buck stops with you. Many of you have felt the sting when things have gone wrong in the past, and the desire never to feel such a terrible sting again. Use the basic methods listed above as a solid beginning, and treat the implementation of these as seriously as you would the details of financial matters – because they are. If you have uncertainties in different or difficult areas, or feel the need for assistance in designing a program, obtaining the right training, or other safety or security matters, seek the help of a well-qualified security professional. Going home at the end of the day with the thought, but also with the reality, that you are doing the right thing for the safety and security for your people is a good feeling. It’s also good business that pays solid dividends. ☒

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For additional background, visit [www.AtlantisSecurity.com](http://www.AtlantisSecurity.com).

## Are you *at RISK*?

(and do you really know?)

- ◆ When was your last assessment of security and life safety risks by a certified, credentialed, security pro?
- ◆ Are your security-safety procedures and systems fully functioning? Sufficient to avoid liability?
- ◆ Incident procedures-documentation up to standards? Can you confidently take the stand in court and withstand an attorney’s examination?

Explore your questions. Make a call to...

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