



Flyer 247

Management of Library Security
July 1999

INTRODUCTION

Although libraries are often considered oases of quiet and decorum by the general public, they have their share of security problems. A SPEC survey issued in January 1999 sought to discover how ARL libraries assure the safety and security of persons, library materials, physical facilities, furnishings, computer equipment, etc. Forty-five of the 122 members of ARL (37%) responded to the survey.

SURVEY RESULTS

Planning. Planning for security varies greatly among respondents. Thirteen respondents (29%) reported having a general statement of philosophy or purpose concerning security, while only 18 (40%) have developed security plans. The average age of these plans is 8.25 years, but a few of the plans are reported to be no longer in effect. Only nine libraries reported having a regular schedule for reviewing and updating their security plans.

In their planning activities, respondents used a variety of strategies and resources. Most libraries (27 or 60%) used literature searches and reviews. Twenty-two libraries (49%) examined the security programs of other libraries. Twenty-one (47%) used consultants or consulted with vendors. Sixteen (36%) attended conferences, workshops, or seminars. Seven (16%) conferred with local security resources, such as campus security units.

Managerial Personnel. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (29) have a designated library security officer. Ten of these officers (36%) appear to focus entirely or primarily on security, as evidenced by the word "security" in their job titles. Other categories of staff have security duties as part of their job: assistant directors for administrative services (22%); facilities managers (11%); access services personnel (11%); administrators (11%); and other job titles (14%), which include director, collections services; assistant director, public services; preservation librarian; and special projects librarian. Administrative oversight for security programs is handled in a variety of ways, with administrators often in charge of security within their functional areas. For example, the assistant director for collections is held responsible for collections security.

Day-to-Day Management. Respondents reported a variety of methods for managing security on a day-to-day basis. Thirty respondents (68%) have manuals (including emergency manuals) that contain information on security issues, and most of the libraries (87%) felt that staff knew about and had access to these manuals. Fourteen respondents (32%) do not have such manuals. Although most libraries reported providing training for staff on library security (75%), 35 libraries (80%) do not have programs for publicizing security information to library users.

Most libraries (32 or 71%) use special security personnel (building monitors, exit guards, etc.). Several libraries reported FTE data on security personnel. Seventeen percent of these FTE were student workers, while 83% were regular security personnel working as library or campus employees or contract employees (the Library of Congress—with its huge professional police force—is not included in this count). Thirteen respondents (29%) have no special security personnel, apparently depending on library employees for most or all of their front-line security. Most libraries (84%) reported receiving some security assistance from their parent institutions, largely through campus police, occasional facility walk-throughs, etc. A very few reported an inadequate response from campus security. Other assistance came from sources such as campus human relations, custodial staff, campus recreation (CPR classes), and university counsel.

Controlling building exits is a major challenge in many ARL libraries. The most common method of exit control (used by 43 or 96%) is the magnetic detection system. Next is the use of library staff at service desks near exits (38 or 84%). Eighteen libraries (40%) use video cameras at exits. Seventeen (38%) use special security personnel. Of course, many libraries use a combination of approaches, the most prevalent being magnetic detection systems and library staff at service desks (16 or 36%).

Monitoring building activities, record keeping, and compiling inventory are important components of security programs. Thirty-four libraries (76%) use some form of electronic monitoring (video cameras, card keys, motion sensors, etc.), but, surprisingly, 11 libraries (24%) reported using no such equipment. Though most libraries (34 or

76%) have a regular process for generating reports of losses, security breaches, injuries, etc., only 14 (31%) regularly keep statistics on number and type of incidents, mutilated materials, etc. Twenty-four respondents (53%) take regular inventories—mostly on an annual basis—of collections, furnishings, etc., for security purposes, including inventories of high-value items alone. Twenty-one libraries (47%), however, do not.

Evaluation. Twenty libraries (47%) were happy with their current security programs, but 53% were not, and most of them planned to make changes in the near future. Agendas varied widely and included most frequently: developing security plans, updating present documentation, changing to card key systems, increasing electronic surveillance, and increasing staff training.

The security challenges that responding libraries mentioned run a fairly predictable gamut:

- facilities with too many unsupervised areas
- theft of personal property
- theft of library materials
- unsecured doors and outside personnel with keys and cards
- mutilation of library materials
- transients and unaffiliated users
- computer vandalism or “tinkering”
- poor cooperation from campus security
- food and drink enforcement
- inappropriate, illegal rest room activities
- clearing the building at closing time

At the same time, several respondents reported areas where their security systems were working well. Notable successes were:

- library monitors trained in CPR
- surveillance and videotaping at entrances and exits
- continuous police patrols
- computerized incident reporting that makes communication with library staff easy and effective, providing an early alert to possible problems
- computer equipment secured through cables, fiber-optic alarm systems, etc.
- panic devices at staff desks and two-way FM radios for staff
- raising staff consciousness about security
- good working relationship with campus security
- working with campus legal counsel

The presence of trained security personnel on-site has really made a difference for a number of libraries—it has even saved lives.

CONCLUSION

The security problems that have plagued the large, unsupervised spaces of ARL libraries for years, such as theft and other kinds of misbehavior, remain a challenge today. Although some libraries appear well organized in their security programs, many lack up-to-date written security plans, effective data gathering, and complete inventory procedures. A number of libraries have not taken advantage of the latest developments in security technology—electronic surveillance, card keys, etc.—and remain dependent on more traditional strategies, such as staff monitoring and magnetic exit control systems.

Developing effective security systems can, of course, be expensive. Too much emphasis on security can create a negative atmosphere for some library users and, if they are responsible for security enforcement, an intolerable situation for some staff. But nonetheless, every library needs a security program adequate for their situation. This checklist is meant to assist libraries by suggesting inexpensive strategies to improve security. Does your library have:

- an overall statement of your security program purpose?
- a security program plan, with an analysis of current systems and action plans for improving them?
- a schedule for reviewing your security program?
- programs for training library staff and informing staff and users about security issues?
- written security procedures accessible to all staff, including an emergency manual?
- an effective system for reporting security-related incidents and keeping records of such incidents?
- at least a partial inventory system for high-value items?
- good working relations with security personnel in your parent institution?

This SPEC Kit was prepared by George J. Soete, ARL/OLMS Organizational Development Consultant, with the assistance of Glen Zimmerman, ARL Senior Program Officer.

SPEC Flyer (ISSN 0160 3574) © 1999 by the ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES. ARL grants blanket permission to reproduce this information for educational use as long as complete attribution is given. For commercial use, requests should be sent to the ARL Publications Department, Association of Research Libraries, 21 Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036. SPEC Kits and Flyers are available by subscription and single issue.