CCIA Update

Please contact the office on 01296-422030 for insurance advice and any of the forms mentioned in this issue.

Voluntary Aided Schools - Premises Security

This bulletin is principally about preventing theft from school premises but it should always be remembered that once entry is gained and intruders remain undetected they can use the opportunity to cause significant damage and disruption to the school by setting fires and more general vandalism. This bulletin contains some practical suggestions which we hope schools will find useful towards making their premises more secure.

Security Fencing - Firstly, it has to be established whether fencing is purely designed to define the perimeter of the property and deter ordinary trespass and nuisance, or if it is designed specifically to severely restrict access? Security fencing should have a deterrent quality that gives a clear message that the area within the fencing is not to be entered without permission. Importantly the fence should be capable of delaying access to intruders, in order that they are more likely to attract attention and be caught before entry is achieved. Security fences should be constructed of steel palisade or weld-mesh of at least 2.4m in height.

Closed Circuit Television - Whilst this can be useful, it is most important to firstly establish in detail what the system is intended to accomplish before it is installed. This needs to complement and be supportive of other security measures such as alarm systems, fencing and external lighting. Features to consider include aspects such as areas to be covered, the siting and protection of cameras, recording and monitoring methodology, colour or black and white images, ability to extend the system at a later date and regular maintenance.

Roof Access - A common problem at many schools is the ease whereby intruders can gain access to low, flat roof areas, which could then enable entry to enclosed courtyards, vulnerable roof lights, or upper floors. Provision of anti-scaling measures should be considered. These may include 'boxing in' exposed rainwater downpipes, or other barrier devices fixed at the roof edge around the building, at potentially vulnerable points in order to deter climbing. Eliminating other potential climbing aids such as low walls and refuse bins that sit by or can be moved up against the side of the building are other points to consider.

External Doors and Windows - Where possible external doors should be made of solid timber or steel and secured by a five lever mortice lock conforming to British Standard 3621. We are aware many external doors are also fire exit doors which cannot be locked during hours of occupation. However, the threat of an intruder entering during school hours can be eliminated by removing the key operated lock and substituting the external handle for internal bolts, so that the door can only be operated from the inside. "Push pad" emergency latches are specifically designed in this way whilst keypad locks could add flexibility at other times. Windows that are easily accessible from the ground or flat roofs should be fitted with key operated locks and/or limiting devices that restrict the amount they can be opened. Laminated glazing is more robust and any remaining louvered windows should be replaced with conventional windows.

Security Lighting - Lighting controlled by P.I.R. movement detectors or on timed switches can assist both the casual and formal surveillance of the school and is therefore best considered in areas which are overlooked or where covered by CCTV. Additionally consider car parks and other such areas that may be regularly accessed by staff or visitors during evenings.

Alarm Systems - When all other reasonable precautions fail to prevent unauthorised access then how well can schools rely on their security alarm? Systems can vary in terms of sophistication and effectiveness. "Bells only" systems rely on the general public's response when triggered, and are therefore of limited value. We would therefore suggest a system that is connected to a key holder, possibly via a Digital Dialler or Alarm Receiving Centre. In the case of high risk schools consideration should also be given to using a monitored line on the BT RedCARE System over an ordinary telephone line, which ensures the call is made even if the line is cut. Ensure that all intruder alarm systems are installed and maintained by an accredited supplier. Any rooms above ground floor level containing substantial amounts of attractive equipment such as computers should be covered by the system as well as areas where control panels are located.

Visitors, including contractors - Clear signs pointing to the main entrance will assist genuine visitors to find the correct entrance and assistance. It may also deter unauthorised persons wandering round the site with the excuse they were looking for the right way in. Once inside get them to sign in and then ensure they are escorted to the correct meeting place or collected by the person they have arranged to see to help deter opportunist theft. A badge system can also be implemented so that authorised visitors are easily identified.

Key-holders - Where the designated key-holder is a member of staff or similar it is important to consider their personal safety when an alarm is triggered. Ideally two persons should attend and no individual should enter the building without the Police or a monitoring company presence where there is clear sign of entry or anything suspicious. Make sure that key holders always have a mobile phone with them when attending on-site. Engaging a professional key-holding company to respond is not without expense but does eliminate any risk to your staff.

Leadership and Staff Responsibility - All staff should be made aware that managing the risk at the school is a shared responsibility. This mainly revolves around basic "housekeeping" measures, such as not leaving unattended items of equipment, including i-pads, laptops or personal possessions, where there is a possibility of opportunist theft. This includes making sure that external doors to classrooms and windows (especially during hot weather) are locked and closed at the end of the school day and that attractive items such as laptops are locked away and out of view. Care should also be taken not to obscure alarm detectors by inappropriate storage and relocation of furniture. Good management practices around control of keys, especially for high risk areas, and safes is also very important. Staff should also be encouraged to politely challenge strangers on-site as this will usually be sufficient to deter the opportunist thief.

Why is this important?

Your insurers advise that typically about one third of all losses notified to them under our scheme relate to instances of theft. Of these approximately 70% are in respect of loss of I.T. equipment and another 20% relate to metal thefts from school roofs. These statistics underline the importance of taking all reasonable steps to initially discourage intruders. Should these fail, then it is clearly important that detection systems are fully operational to ensure a prompt and effective response to hopefully limit the loss impact on the school. The cost to the school isn't just the £250 policy excess, there could be disruption to learning, extra administration work and time costs for the staff members in charge of re-equipping the school.