

Security 2006?

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The amazing thing to me is the more things are improved the more they are the same. Take Security as an example. Over the last few weeks I have attended two industry trade shows. The first dealt with the storage industry, the second with car washing.

The storage industry has unique needs in comparison to car washing. Here you are charged with the protection of your clients goods while under your watchful eye. You have to run your operation like a fort! No one in unless they have the magic password. Even if they have the password you still have to be ever so watchful for those who are in arrears. It seems like a never ending vigil, certainly one that car washers who work on cash and carry don't have to be concerned with, or do we?

Car washers have a different although just as frustrating security issue.

When a customer enters our property, just like the storage facility, we are at risk. If we are a full service car washer we ask the motorist to exit their vehicle. From that moment on, until they exit their vehicle and leave the property we are liable. In most cases this is not a problem; however once we enter their vehicle any thing that occurs on the inside or outside is our risk. On occasion a customer will make claims relating to an item or items that are missing from their vehicle. To protect both ourselves as well as our customers we have security cameras in all key areas. In most cases this acts not only as a deterrent but as insurance for the operator. Interviewing, acquiring, retention, and training of employees is key to managing potential difficult customer relations.

But what about unattended car washes? Although the question of internal risk has been eliminated there is the question of vehicle exteriors. Unfortunately for car washes a few motorists look to us as an easy target for external damages. In some cases the motorist may have done damage to their vehicle and it did not become evident until the vehicle was cleaned. With the advent of "touch free" as well as "soft touch friction" the amount of vehicle damage has all but disappeared on vehicles that are intact. However with a vehicle that has existing damage it is possible to further aggravate the situation. Here again the only protection is security cameras. Fortunately images can be captured digitally, time stamped at the time of transaction, and recorded on hard drives for retrieval when required. This technology is required by all operators to safeguard both the site as well as for the prevention of improper claims.

So far we have come up with security systems and procedures for answering claims, as well as recording damages to our property but what about events that are truly accidents? Recently there have been reported incidents of uncontrolled vehicle acceleration. Literally vehicles that seem possessed! These incidents have occurred many times at car washes in the past. Recently Jeep Cherokees seem to be the main

perpetrator. In some cases it seems that the event occurs after being washed. In a few other reported incidents it will happen while entering the facility. But no matter where sudden acceleration of a vehicle occurs it is a very scary event resulting in serious damages and occasionally with the loss of life.

So what recourse do you have? How do you protect yourself as well as your customers? The most obvious would be to not allow these vehicles on your property. For many washers this would result in an economic loss of good proportions. However if you could secure your property and protect it would it not be worth it? Where we have employees again it goes back to training and the establishment of safe vehicle handling procedures. For the unattended the only method would be signage and other informational data available for the public. To say this is a very serious situation would be sugar coating the potential for catastrophic results. As operators the buck, so far, stops with us. What else can we do? First we need to be fully informed regarding any vehicle that could damage our site, next we need to inform all our stakeholders, and lastly if we exert enough pressure maybe the manufacturers of these vehicles with unexplained acceleration will correct the problem

Although these incidents occur as retail businesses we are subject to security breaches from all corners. In the "C" store business they train you on loss prevention, internal shrinkage. Shrinkage comes both from employees as well as customers. This as in the other examples begs the question when is training, and technology enough to secure our sites? As long as we deal with the public there will always be risk, there will always be the opportunity for some one to breach our security measures.

One of the most effective ways to learn about the security challenges and remedies are associations, trade shows and research either on the web or in networking with other operators. In the last two trade shows the amount of new technology was fantastic. Unfortunately living in a litigious society has spawned a billion dollar security industry that we as operators cannot live without.

Bottom line be involved in your industry, participate in industry events and most importantly be aware that some of the vehicles that enter your property are potential time bombs.