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Sgt. Don Smith
Technical Services Director,
Westchester DOC

Corrective Action

Software House® and American Dynamics™ security products revamp the Westchester County Department of Correction



In the early 1990s, the Westchester County Department of Correction (DOC) in Valhalla, N.Y., was hardly

a model of efficient security. The complex access control system hampered security efforts and the proprietary system forced security officials to use only cards and equipment from one particular vendor.

The costly, four-building Westchester DOC system consisted of four buildings: the maximum-security penitentiary of 365 beds, the jail for those awaiting trial, DOC headquarters, and the DOC annex for an overflow prison population.



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“Problems just plagued the system,” said Sgt. Don Smith, technical services director for the Westchester County Department of Correction. “Door readers weren’t working, cards weren’t working, and we needed to look for a new system.”

Then, about four years ago, prison officials requested money to change the outdated and ineffective system. In the end, county officials chose security products from Software House and American Dynamics, both part of Tyco Fire & Security’s Access Control and Video Systems business unit. So far, nearly 200 card readers tied to Software House’s C•CURE access control system and more than 200 CCTV cameras and 23 Intellex® digital video recorders from American Dynamics.

Security officials selected the system largely because of the effectiveness and reliability of the Software House and American Dynamics products that were previously installed at the nearby Westchester County executive building.

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Implementing a Solution with C•CURE 800 and Intellex

During the course of this year Antar-Com Inc., a company in White Plains, N.Y., that is a part of the Diebold Enterprise Security Systems group that provides integrated security and

communications solutions, installed the C•CURE 800 and Intellex security solution. Since initial installation the integrated solution has worked seamlessly. The equipment is installed in four different building complexes to form a totally integrated system.

The DOC penitentiary went on-line with new security measures in April 2004. The C•CURE 800 access control system manages all of the sliding doors leading into corridors of the penitentiary, and enables security personnel to link specific events to video generated by any of the 14 integrated Intellex digital video recorders.

Specifically, the 200 card readers interact with a programmable logic controller, which locks and unlocks corridor doors, exit doors, housing entrances, and sliding doors that lead to cell blocks.

In addition, security officials created an intercom system integrated with American Dynamics’ 1024 matrix switcher and more than 200 CCTV cameras. As a

result, when an officer pushes a button for the intercom, the camera will concentrate on the intercom area, allowing the officer to view the person with whom they are speaking.

There are two levels of security. The first level features a security officer who has a membrane control panel in front of him that includes a map of his area of responsibility. That officer can unlock doors directly from this panel. The other level allows officers to take command of the membrane in





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emergency situations, and enables the control center officer to oversee the entire area without any other officer intervention.

In the event that an officer is under assault, another officer sitting nearby in a 10-foot by 10-foot glassed-in “control bubble” can aid or override local security officers in case of danger. Software House systems control all of the doors leading to the “bubble.”

In addition to the penitentiary, the jail was outfitted with the C•CURE system in the summer of 2004. Male and female prisoners are housed in different parts of the facility. The security for the fourth floor, which houses women, can be programmed to decline elevator access to those workers who do not have work privileges on that floor, and can provide corroborating digital video if necessary. The jail also has four Intellex DVRs.

The new security implementation extended to the 22-person DOC headquarters as well. The headquarters house the deputy commissioners’ offices, payroll, special investigation units and all IT servers. “The headquarters had no access control at all,” noted Sgt. Smith. “Our entirely key-driven system spelled problems if the keys fell into the wrong hands.”

Smith said it is vital to have an access control system for the headquarters. The reader-controlled doors signal when workers enter and exit the building and whether someone is inside during work hours or after hours. “If someone comes in after hours or early in the morning or late at night, an e-mail will be sent to my Blackberry to tell me who’s coming in and out of the building,” he said, adding that the headquarters has one Intellex DVR.

Finally, the DOC annex, which holds 52 additional inmates, has C•CURE 800 and Intellex systems. Front doors also contain card readers in addition to two gates within the building. The building also has four DVRs that will record motion and video 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the annex, allowing for complete security of the facility.

“We’ve created an annex profile that recognizes certain people and allows them to come in and out of the building,” said Smith.

Swift Installation, Helpful Training

Despite the outwardly challenging installation in four separate buildings, Antar-Com and its president, Isac Tabib, were ready for the task. “Antar-Com really came through for us,” said Smith. “We really needed to have the access control system installed in the women’s unit right away. I called Isac on a Friday and by the following Tuesday, the whole project was completed.”

The DOC had other challenges as well. The inadequate ID system was merely a picture on a card that failed to provide the security the DOC needed. Now, more than 900 proximity cards will be programmed by Software House, and half of the cards have been programmed to date.

Additionally, training for the new system helped. Smith attended an access control training course at Tyco’s office in Boca Raton, Fla. “The training expands our knowledge in terms of being able to do things such as design reports and understand lockout procedures,” he said, adding that the weeklong training classes enabled him to become better versed on general security measures.



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Cost control is another benefit to using the integrated Software House and American Dynamics system. DOC security personnel, Smith noted, can purchase many off-the-shelf components. “We can go to a supply store that has readers,” said Smith. “We don’t have to buy proprietary readers. We don’t have to stock equipment, so cost-wise, it’s easier to manage and saves time. Saving me time is saving me money.”

Impressive Returns

A primary return on investment, said Smith, is the increased ease in assisting 850 corrections officers and supervisors who need access privileges. He can manage access to the buildings remotely or at headquarters.

For example, he received a call recently because of a disabled transmitter in one of the facilities. Instead of making the 39-mile ride from his home to unlock the door leading to the transmitter, Smith booted up his laptop at home, logged onto the VPN, and highlighted the door in question. He then clicked a button that opened the door and allowed the officer to escort the technician to the faulty transmitter. “With the old system I couldn’t manage it remotely,” noted Smith.

Smith pointed to another recent incident in which the warden called him and told him that he needed officers to gain access into a stairwell into the penitentiary. Smith, again at his home an hour away, simply designated a particular door to the officers’ access profiles. The officers then gained access to the stairwell.

“There is nothing worse than standing out in the rain and pushing your card into the reader and it doesn’t work,” he said. “I don’t get those calls anymore. The system is always up and

running.” Another benefit, Smith said, lies in the ability to disable a card that is lost or stolen.

Smith also praised Antar-Com for its efforts. “One portion of the job that Antar-Com made easy for me is the ability to do my job here in my office or remotely,” said Smith. “It’s a huge benefit to be able to manage the system.”

In the end, the highly integrated Software House and American Dynamics security systems benefit the four-building Department of Correction system and give it a measure of stability and functionality previously unseen. □

System Summary

Project:

Westchester County Department of Corrections, 4 buildings

Location:

Valhalla, New York

Products:

Cameras, MegaPower 1024 matrix switcher, Intellex, card readers and C•CURE 800.

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