

What are the unforeseen issues with respect to out-of-hours security that a Facility Manager (FM) should be aware of, and how can they be resolved?

One of the primary issues relating to out of hours security facing a Facilities Manager today is the challenge of balanced duties being carried out by Security Officers during the silent hours.

Certainly within the UK, a significant number of security contracts are managed by Facilities Managers, and as with all other sectors of industry today, security costs are constantly under scrutiny and pressure. It is now a common occurrence for Security Officer cover to be reduced during the silent hours, between 1700hrs and 0900hrs, generally from two Officers during the day, to only one Security Officers during the night; the lone worker concept.

During the late 1990's, a number of contract security companies in the UK began to offer a 'one stop shop' service, with Security Officers being instructed, within the Site Assignment Instructions (AI's), to carry out a number of FM support tasks; such as routine maintenance patrols, water and printer paper replenishment, switchboard duties etc. This was generally referred to as facilities support, and was of course very attractive to the potential client, as it would alleviate a number of problems generally faced during the silent hours. It also offered a more varied tour of duty for the Security Officer; he or she would be occupied and this would help the night duty to pass quicker.

However, on a number of occasions, security incidents would occur on site, with the Security Officer not being alerted, because he or she was engaged in one of the growing number of FM support tasks, subtly included in the site AI's. This would ensure conflict and recriminations, with allegations of contractual neglect, and with the fall out often including loss by the client, and at times dismissal of the Security Officer.

This situation is not only unacceptable in terms of loss to the client, it also increase the threat to the lone Security officer. Facilities Managers must understand that whilst there is a major attraction to Security Officers carrying out FM support duties during the silent hours, the same officer is primarily contracted to protect the assets of the of the client.

In the vast majority of cases, the FM support arrangements are productive, with all parties being comfortable with such arrangements. However, FM's must ask themselves, "Is this a risk worth taking. Does the value of additional FM support from the security company outweigh the risk of a major criminal incident, were assets may be threatened, and Security Officer's safety is compromised".

Charles Swanson MSc CSyP SIRM

Charles Swanson is a self-employed security and risk management consultant, and currently comments on security risk management within the Institute of Risk Management. Charles is a Principal Trainer for Perpetuity Training and ARC Training International.