

**Managing Excessive Alarms from Card Access System**  
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## **Abstract**

*When card access systems were installed on the Florida State University Campus, the Chief of Police made the decision to treat these systems as a means to monitor the areas with the systems as if they were intrusion alarm systems, vowing to respond to events such as doors held, doors forced open, etc. As more systems were added, the task of monitoring and responding to reported events became unmanageable. By 2002, over 25,000 card access alarms were received per month, most of which were a result of individuals not properly utilizing the system. For instance, keys were still being used to open card access doors, resulting in “door forced open” events. Monitored doors were being propped open, resulting in “door held open” events. Obviously, 25,000 alarms were not manageable by any University Policy Department, no matter how committed to response they were.*

## **Florida State University**

Florida State University, established in 1851, is a comprehensive, national graduate research University that puts research into action for the benefit of our students and society. With an impressive breadth of leading graduate, professional and undergraduate programs, and an international reputation in the sciences and humanities, Florida State University is a demanding and intellectually stimulating environment for students and faculty.

Recent global and university events have brought security and access to the forefront. Thus, it was important to have a system in place that managed the callouts so that when a real emergency occurred, response was available. This submission addresses these issues.

## **Problem/Initiative**

A variety of security systems and services are utilized on campus, including intrusion alarm systems (a/k/a burglar alarms), card access systems, closed circuit television monitoring and DVR recording systems, and bluelight emergency telephones. Prior to 2002, University departments were permitted to seek and implement individual security systems in their areas, resulting in a hodge-podge of systems on campus, some of which were monitored by the FSU Police Department (FSUPD), some monitored by outside monitoring companies, some not monitored at all. In the end however, if an intrusion alarm was generated, the FSUPD was responsible for responding upon receiving a call from the outside monitoring agency, or upon receiving an alarm through their in-house alarm receiver.

In addition to the burglar alarm systems, card access systems were being installed on campus. These systems were regulated by University administration so that the systems would be integrated through the FSU-chosen card access system (cCure by Software House). The monitoring of events generated by violations in card access was also deemed to be a responsibility of the FSUPD. In the early days this was a manageable task. But as new systems were installed and existing systems expanded, the result was over 25,000 alarms per month from the multitude of card access monitoring points. This was in addition to alarms received on the FSUPD alarm receiver for intrusion alarm/burglar alarm systems. Because the FSUPD could not possibly respond to these high numbers of alarms, it was obvious that something must be done in order to meet expectations from University departments concerning FSUPD response, and to preserve the University's respect for the police department.

## **Design**

In 2002 the University Senior Vice President for Finance & Administration formed the University Electronic Access & Security (EAS) Committee to address a number of issues and concerns about card access alarms and FSUPD response to them. The Committee was charged with specific advisory responsibility for matters of policy and direction concerning Electronic Access and Security devices on Campus. Specifically, the committee was instructed to make recommendations on the following issues:

- Overall philosophy regarding the University's stance regarding Centralized Card Access Electronic Security Systems
- Response procedures and policy for the University Police Department to electronic alarms.
- User Obligations to include expectations and accountability measures
- Update University Policies related to access control and security
- Review and recommend improvements in user education efforts
- Review procedures for the use of general purpose classrooms outside of regularly scheduled classes

The administration further directed the Committee as to its membership, stating that the EAS Committee membership was not to exceed fifteen (15) people, each of whom would be subject to the approval of the Associate Vice President of Finance. The following departments were to provide representatives:

- FSU Police Department
- Office of Telecommunications

- Environmental Health and Safety
- Planning and Facilities
- At least two members from the community of users
- University Housing
- Academic Computing and Network Services
- Student Government

Finally, the EAS committee was instructed to submit all recommendations to the Associate Vice President of Finance who would, in turn, review all such items and provide appropriate response to the EAS, normally within thirty (30) business days. This committee's original commission expired June 30, 2007 but was renewed for one year by the Associate Vice President of Finance.

### **Implementation**

The EAS Committee began meeting quarterly. The following initial steps were taken to enable the members to fully understand the issues:

- Creation of reports from the cCure Card Access System detailing alarms received per month for both building perimeter and interior areas monitored by card access.
- Inventory of all doors and areas currently equipped with card access components.
- Technical presentations explaining the card access systems, how and why alarms are generated for different types of events, and providing opportunities for committee members to fully understand the operations and the causes of the magnitude of alarms.

Between 2002 and 2007, the EAS Committee has met at least quarterly, and has made the following recommendations to the Associate Vice President, all of which have been accepted and implemented. The implementation of these recommendations has resulted in drastic reductions in the number of card access alarms to which the FSUPD is expected to respond:

- FSU Housing implemented a “no arming” policy for all residence halls. When the residence halls are occupied, the buildings are not armed and thus do not send alarms to the FSUPD; when they are unoccupied they are armed and monitored by the FSUPD which responds to alarms during times the halls are not occupied.
- Standards were established for new card access installations, including a new standard that all doors with door contacts must have a request to exit to allow shunting of alarms upon exit from the area.
- All buildings with perimeter card access were to be re-keyed, changing lock cylinders out to a key type possessed only by the FSUPD and the University Key Shop. In addition, the ability to “dog-down” controlled doors was removed. (Some doors have a “dog-down” feature that, using a special tool, allows the door to be put into a permanent unlocked state, thus allowing it to be opened without card access authorization resulting in a “door forced” alarm condition.)
- All areas undergoing installation of new interior card access were to be re-keyed following the installation of the system. Older applications are re-keyed as needed if and when excessive alarms are found to be an issue.
- Revisions to FSU Policy OP-H-4 and Policy OP-G-3, established a clear policy that all University departments must arrange for new security installations through

the FSU Office of Telecommunications to ensure adherence to installation and implementation guidelines.

- The University arming policy (hours during which alarms are sent for held-open, forced-open, and other security breach conditions) was to be changed University-wide to a standard of arming from 11:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday, and all weekends from Friday 11:00 p.m. until Monday 5:00 a.m. Holidays are treated as weekend days. The following areas, considered “mandatory alarm areas” were exempted from this policy:
  - Controlled substance storage areas
  - Cash storage or cash collection areas
  - Technology-enhanced classrooms
  - Storage areas for confidential student and employee records
- Signage was to be placed on all alarmed doors and areas alerting faculty, staff and students that the door and/or area is alarmed, including mandatory alarm areas.
- An audible alarm will be required on doors with particularly high incidences of alarms at the discretion of the FSU Public Safety Department.
- Shunt time for held-open conditions was to be extended from a standard 90-second shunt time to a 10-minute shunt time. (Shunt time is the period of time during which a door can be held open without sending an alarm.) Upon future evaluation, this shunt time may be increased up to 30-minutes with approval from FSU Police Department. Mandatory alarm areas were exempted from this policy also.

- Conversion from an antiquated Software House cCure One Plus system to the newer Software House cCure 800 system, including physical inspection of card access components at all locations and replacement of non-working parts that led to false alarms.

Other recommendations made by the EAS Committee have not yet been approved nor implemented. Implementation of these recommendations is on hold, pending evaluation of the effect of other recommendations. These recommendations include:

- Interior doors will not be alarmed unless specifically requested by the tenant and approved by the FSUPD.
- A charge for alarming interior doors and areas will be established and implemented, including mandatory alarm doors and areas as defined in the first paragraph above.

Some budgetary impact was realized due to costs associated with re-keying building perimeter doors, placement of signage at all monitor points, and the requirement of mandatory requests to exit at all monitored doors. These costs were absorbed by central administration funding.

### **Benefits**

As each of the recommendations above was fully implemented, the EAS Committee saw a steady drop in the numbers of card access alarms, the greatest of which was a result of the Housing alarm policy implementation, followed by the re-keying of doors. Card access system alarms have been reduced from in excess of 25,000 per month to a current level of less than 4,000 per month. Because of the fewer alarms, FSUPD has increased its rate of response as well as the time to respond to alarms. Faculty, staff and

student expectations of security are not negatively affected as they might have been had the situation continued. Had the excessive alarm situation continued, the University would have likely faced significant cost increases for security personnel who would have been critical to maintaining the level of security personnel response expected by the University Community.

Thanks to the upgrade of the card access systems, there is more programming flexibility allowing for more creative solutions and greater ease in meeting departments needs (as well as those of the FSUPD), particularly for special events which were major contributors to alarms after hours.

The establishment of the EAS Committee was a stroke of genius on the part of the University Administrators. Bringing this diverse representation from across multiple campus departments has allowed a greater understanding of the challenges faced, and successes experienced, by the FSUPD and the Office of Telecommunications as the overseer and manager of card access and security systems. Working together the Committee has made a significant positive impact on management of security for Florida State University.