

SECURITY

SOLUTIONS FOR ENTERPRISE MANAGERS

How Private Security Is Driving Down Crime

Contributed by Robert McCrie, professor of security management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and publisher of *The Security Letter*

A disturbed 20-year-old shoots his mother fatally, then heads off to an elementary school and massacres 20 young kids and six adults before ending his own life. One week later in the next state, a man released from prison for having killed his grandmother with a hammer sets his own car and house on fire and positions himself to assassinate two first responders and injure two others before committing suicide. These brutal recent criminal scenes are etched on the public's consciousness.

Yet, hard as it is for many to grasp, our society is becoming progressively safer. Private security has much to do with that development. These are two separate assertions. Let's examine the first one; lower criminality is a reality.

- The FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports (UCRs)* tabulate serious reported crime derived from as many as 14,000 law enforcement agencies. Twice a year findings are posted. Since 1991, total serious crimes have declined – and how! Almost every sector of the nation has seen substantively lower crime in the past generation. Adjusting for population growth over the years, *UCRs* have plunged from 5,898 incidents per 100,000 population in 1991, to 3,295 in 2011. That's a remarkable 44 percent drop in two decades.
- Another measurement looks at the crime differently. The Department of Justice's *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)* asks statistically selected participants to keep a diary of all criminal incidents in their households. This self-report measurement began in 1973 and is projected to a national estimate of major and minor crime, excluding homicide. In its most recent release, *NCVS* was up from the previous year, but still near the lowest point in its history.
- Bank crime continues to drift lower. The number of incidents drop while bank branches and stand-alone ATMs rise in numbers: In 1991, robbery of all banks totaled 9,381. In 2011, the total was 5,014, down 46.5 percent in two decades.
- Retail crime is lower. Retail shrinkage is still a \$34.5 billion a year loss issue. But the *National Retail Survey* conducted by Richard Hollinger and colleagues at the University of Florida, Tallahassee, show a significant decline trend. In 1991, the

shrinkage rate was 1.79 percent for all retail categories. In 2012, it eased to 1.41 percent. That's billions retailers and customers have saved from less employee dishonesty, shoplifting, delivery shortages and human errors.

Now how does private security fit into this?

A few years ago a brash small airline used the ad tagline, "If you've got it, flaunt it!" The security industry has a right to gloat over its contribution to those salutary developments. Hardly anybody seems to realize the connection. Security services, technology, products and management strategies all have had so much to do with this magnificent achievement of a safe society.

The specifics to show how security makes a critical difference deserve more space than I have available. I'll just cite three:

- Access control is much better. Years ago unauthorized people walked almost anywhere without being stopped. A few of them were thieves, vandals or people seeking revenge. Today gates, security officers, television, voice communications, ID and biometric systems, and better protective hardware have made those concentric circles of protection we create stronger than ever. As a result, less crime occurs.
- Alarm systems pay off. Commercial alarm systems are more than 150 years old in America. But do they do any good? Common sense says yes, but research was lacking. Seungmug (Zech) Lee at Western Illinois University, Macomb, while at Rutgers, conducted convincing research demonstrating that residential security alarms measurably decrease incidence of home burglaries. More research is needed; but the initial results substantiate what operators of alarmed premises and their client base presumed for years.
- Police and private security are working together better than ever. This is a safe generalization, although scenarios of failure-to-work-together can still be found. When the two do cooperate, a diffusion of benefits has resulted that leads to safer businesses, institutions and residential areas, as well as mutual respect.

Smarter, better metrics-oriented policing has been a huge factor in the beneficial trend. But other resources are enhancing civil safety. A new year has arrived. Don't expect editorialists around the nation to grasp the importance of what security services and systems providers and their customers have helped achieve. You deserve to flaunt it: better security is making us all safer.