Be prepared to secure your business: get an escalation plan.

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Quality security personnel can circumvent many security issues which threaten your business. Their visible presence warns world-be miscreants that bad behavior will be shut down and involved individuals apprehended. Controlling public access points ensures orderly movement of people, while securing restricted access points can protect sensitive locations, equipment and VIPs.

However, the visible side of the security industry is just the beginning. Escalation plans inform both security personnel and business employees how to react in a variety of scenarios, better protecting personnel and property.

Supporting your front line of defense

On-site security officers should never be acting alone. Instead, they should be checking in periodically with a back-up control centre. Failure to do so triggers an appropriate escalation response to secure the safety of both the client and the officer.

Security personnel also reach out to support staff when they've:

- Witnessed suspicious or illegal behavior,

- Suffered an injury or health issue,

- Engaged in an altercation,

- Discovered damage to property,

- Encountered someone suffering an injury or health issue.

The support staff chooses how to respond to the situation, which might include sending more personnel or contacting emergency services. To provide the most effective response, GardaWorld control centres have agreed-upon, standard operating procedures detailing exactly what steps to take in a particular situation, which operators use when dealing with emergency situations.

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Five steps for emergency escalation planning

It is vitally important to also establish an emergency escalation plan. You may also hear them called business continuity plans, disaster recovery plans, threat litigation plans or emergency response plans. Not matter what you call it, this is what protects your company when an acute situation threatens it, everything from a natural disaster to a major IT crash.

1. Get executive-level buy-in

Emergency response plans are not limited to a single department. Every employee needs to understand her and his place in the face of an emergency and be fully accountable so business can continue with as little disruption as possible. As such, it's vital to get members of the company executive team on board with the project. The support will help spearhead it throughout the company and make sure everyone is on the same page.

2. Determine stakeholder functions and role

In an emergency escalation plan, stakeholders typically include people from operations, security, HR, facilities, IT and communications. The plan should define, in writing, what roles are necessary, and it should assign individuals to each role as well as a backup individual. Both of these people must possess the appropriate decision-making authority to carry out all aspects of his or her role, including spending levels, if necessary. Without proper authority, critical time can be lost in seeking permission to engage or commit needed resources of time and/or money. Especially when most of the work involves after hours coverage, a detailed list of who to call and what authority's personnel have is invaluable.

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3. Document potential emergency situations and responses

Emergency responses should be appropriate for particular situations. Of course, no two situations might be exactly alike, so flexibility is required. Still, responses can be described and documented for general types of emergency situations, including:

- Fire
- Medical emergency
- Hazardous spill
- Power outage
- Natural disaster
- Labour dispute

Relevant external parties should be identified and contact information listed in the contingency and active threat response plans, such as public safety, local utilities, and other vendors whose supplies and services might be impacted or needed. Escalation paths for each emergency scenario should be described in detail.

4. Do not forget funding

The costs of an emergency response can be varied and add up, so contingency funding should be identified including where it will come from and, as mentioned, who has the authority to spend it. Insurance can help, of course, but not in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

5. Test your plan

Don't wait for a real emergency to test your plan. Test it immediately after approval and then once after that. Names and contact data should be validated semi-annually, if not more frequently.

Testing should have three phases: a thorough plan review by all the stakeholders; a "tabletop test" with all the stakeholders in a meeting or on the phone to walk through specific scenarios; and, finally, a simulation test in which stakeholders must actually perform their roles for a particular type of emergency.

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Review and reflect

Following any emergency response, document the steps taken. Then gather all the stakeholders together to evaluate how the plan worked and revise as needed.

Robust security demands thorough planning which addresses potential complications and how to best address them. The ability to promptly and adequately escalate a response increases the likelihood that personnel and property will remain unharmed and business can function as normal. Escalation plans are, therefore, a centrally important part of your overall security program.
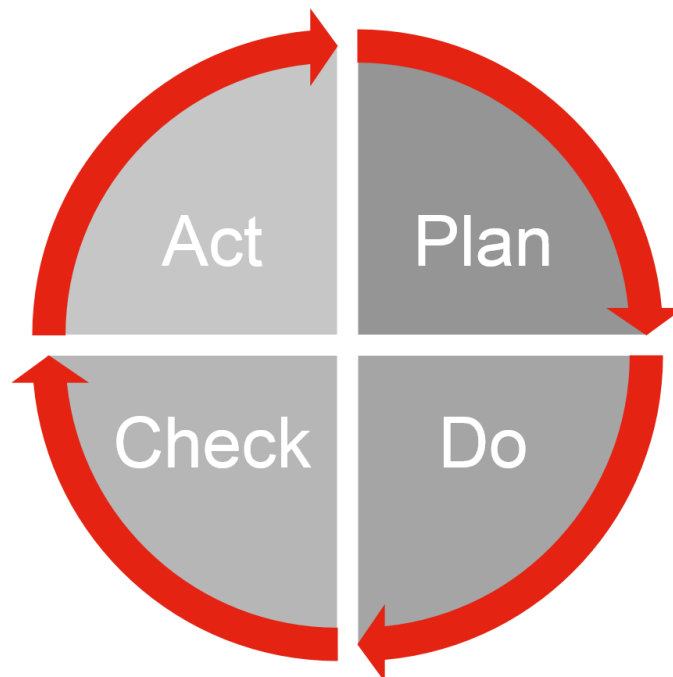
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