

Playing for Time...

...Adherence to the edicts laid down in the Working Time Directive necessitates forward planning by in-house security managers and their preferred guarding contractor(s). The first step on the road to a 48-hour working week is to examine major security objectives, and then draft your requirements for placement before the Board. **John Julian** outlines a blueprint for change.

AT THE ORGANISATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE in September 2003, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) reported that – to date – the Working Time Directive has had only a limited impact in the UK. According to the TUC, the Directive has only reduced the number of people working long hours on home shores by a mere 3%. That leaves no small matter of 4 million employees still working more than 48 hours in any given week.

In part, of course, this is due to the unique exemption clause that affords individual workers in the UK the right to opt out of the 48-hour average weekly working time. That said, the European Commission is set to review this derogation clause in November, and it is still possible that pressure will be applied such that we conform to the rest of Europe by introducing changes sometime in 2004-2005.

The loss of this opt-out clause and the impact it will have on the manned security industry has of course been the subject of much debate. In particular, considerable angst has been expressed concerning exactly where the expected shortfall in labour – estimated by the British Security Industry Association to be as much as 20-30% – will come from by way of accommodating any new amendments. Add-in the impact of the Private Security Industry Act 2001 – and Security Industry Authority forecasts that the number of security staff who will not qualify for licenses because of past conviction records to be possibly as high as 30% again – and it is easy to appreciate the enormity of the problem.

If they have not already done so, client organisations operating in the private sector need to start planning their future security needs and service delivery now, taking into account any possible changes in the law. There are several areas that are worthy of consideration.

Review your budget

First, check what you're committed to. Who carries the cost of change? Clearly, the biggest impact the Working Time Directive would have is on cost. Budgets would have to be reviewed whether security staff are outsourced or employed in-house.

If outsourced, there's a high probability that the end user's contract with the service provider is based on a sixty-hour working week, and is contracted over a three-year period. If the contract has been agreed only recently, then some reference will probably have been made to costs associated with any changes to the 48-hour week. The contract is likely to include a fairly standard exclusion, something along the lines of: "This proposal is offered subject to any changes in conditions arising from legislation".

The most likely scenario will be that any increase in costs due to legislation – i.e. the reduction in permissible working hours – will fall on the employer and not the contractor. You also need to ask yourself whether or not you can afford the change in working practices. Is the money available? In order to keep the same level of staff cover, additional officers will have to be employed because, with the best will in the world, guarding contractors will not be able to absorb the additional costs involved. If it's anticipated that changes are not going to be made in respect of how security provision is implemented and managed then budgets will have to be increased substantially. For some managers, it may already be too late to bid for additional funds for next year.

Many businesses and manned guarding companies have already moved towards the improved working conditions that the Working Time Directive demands. As a result, they should see relatively little impact if and when the 48-hour working week becomes mandatory (other than a probable increase in attempts by competitors to headhunt their better members of staff).

Those that are not in the throes of planning for change should ready themselves for major difficulties, not just when it comes to finding the necessary funding, but also in sourcing and retaining quality security operatives. As there's likely to be severe resistance to granting extra funding, planning now on how to provide equivalent or even improved security at the same cost is vital. The first step is to break down the objectives, and determine your essential requirements. For example, you'll need to provide the same (or better) level(s) of access and egress control over the same time periods. You'll need to offer a monitoring service for both asset security and staff safety (with less people). There'll also be a need for effective response to both incidents and customer concerns.

At all times, levels of security must be maintained such that they're commensurate with the risk and degree of business development. An environment must be created that will minimise staff loss and/or turnover.

At this point, it may also be possible to identify roles or activities that might be transferred to other staff functions, or even discarded. If so, then a reduction in staffing levels is likely – but will almost certainly not balance the shortfall. It's also important to note here that, although electronic security systems play a valuable part in safeguarding buildings, their contents and members of staff, they're not always 100% effective on their own. They need to be viewed as an integral part of the overall security plan. Let's face facts – what's the value of a CCTV camera if no one ever views the image it generates? Similarly, what good is an alarm signal if no one responds to it?

Reviewing your access needs

Review the number of entrances and exits in use on site. Could they be reduced without adversely affecting the smooth flow of the business? Consider that question for the entire working spectrum. Do you really need to have three entranceways open 24 hours a day, or might that change when staff numbers are reduced? If you have both reception staff and security officers at the same point of entry/ egress, are there periods when one party alone could effectively be cover both roles?

Can you, for example, deploy a locked door system operated by the receptionist/ officer after, say, 5.00pm to save at least an hour per day on costs?

What physical and/or electronic controls do you have, or would you need to reduce the human presence? Full-height access control turnstiles, tube stiles and air lock doors, etc have been available to end-users for some time now. Indeed, even in the late 1980s one main manufacturing plant just north of London reduced its security guarding force by 17 officers (or 20%) simply by installing perimeter access turnstiles. And there was no reduction in site security standards, either.

Continued from page 1

If you're thinking of automating your access and exit controls it will almost invariably be cheaper over a 5-10 year period than maintaining 'human' controllers. However, security managers should remember that they need to consider more than just the initial cost and eventual cost saving when looking at automatic access/egress control.

In essence, security managers must bear in mind the following:

- **The corporate image:** will an automated entry system be in keeping with the company's image? Would it be acceptable for your clients to use an intercom when gaining entry? In many cases the main entrance will continue to require the human presence, but there are often other access points (staff only) that can be automated. It's usually the case that you can leave the main door open and uncontrolled, and place the access control into the working/meeting areas under reception control, thus maintaining the corporate image without guards.
- **The flow requirements:** how many staff per hour will pass through the entrances/exits, how many visitors, wheelchairs and packages, etc? An access control system that allows in wheelchair or person in a suitcase, say, will also allow tailgating. A single person entry turnstile or tube stile takes time to use (typically around 5-10 seconds). If 50 employees arrive together how long does the last one - invariably the CEO - wait? Free flowing access systems will log in authorised persons and alarm when others try to enter, but you still need the human response to deal with the "intruder".
- **The structure of the automatic barrier:** can it be climbed over, manually forced open or climbed under? Will you need higher more robust barriers, alarm sensors, anti-climb devices and monitoring cameras, etc?
- **Reaction** to any barrier being forced or crossed: if you totally do away with "security" on site, who'll respond to any incidents? Do you have suitable (insured) staff on site who are willing and capable?

Thinking about company assets

If you were to take away the security officer searches at the exit point, would this increase the probability of theft? If you think it would, then you need to consider how you will identify items being removed. Lets accept the fact that it is common for major businesses to lose 1 -5 laptops every month!

Thus, the removal of the deterrent factor and the actual physical detection service provided by security officer search procedures will need to be replaced. Can you reasonably place that responsibility with the contractors' supervisors? Do you need to price for asset tagging, or do you actually require the security officers back in place?

If you consider it appropriate to reduce the size of the security team on site, then you need to examine the safety service provided by your current team. Can this be covered by additional in-house staff that have been trained in first aid? Might the maintenance contractor carry out fire equipment inspections? Will your fire detection discover the smouldering fire? If so you may have a reduction option on your hands, but examine the costs. Any company will expect to be paid if they take on these additional tasks.

We all know of cases where in-house or contracted security has been found wanting after poor response to an incident, but there are many more cases where their immediate action has prevented escalation and injury or damage. Is this an area where you might be able to deploy staff rather than the security team?

Cost approvals relating to security

Unless "The Board" is aware that they're facing truly awesome risks, any manager making a 30%-plus increase in budget is likely to be viewed with some suspicion.

Four major steps are suggested to prepare them for change:

- Alert senior management to the required changes, and inform them that the most cost effective solution is being investigated.
- Identify the changes and physical or electronic means by which you will be able to reduce the number of staff required - not just for the transition to the 48hour week, but along a decreasing scale over the next five years.
- Establish an outline of capital and recurring (staff related) costs that would be incurred over this same five-year period.
- Demonstrate to management that annual costs (over the five year period) can be maintained at a reasonable level as growing systems reduce the headcount (in an ideal world with the cost in year 3 onwards falling below current levels).

"It is commonly acknowledged that there are many associated benefits derived from a shorter working week, but it has also been recognised that the security officer's role has to become more challenging"

These steps will need to be taken fairly quickly after the first alert, and you should be prepared to enlist professional help if your own resources are insufficient. While external consultancy carries a cost, it's a minimal one compared to the possible consequences of 'getting it wrong'. It's essential that both manning levels and the role of the security operatives - as well as system needs - are accurately determined and designed. If the system leaves vulnerabilities or costs escalate, consider the consequences.

It's commonly acknowledged that there are many associated benefits derived from a shorter working week but it has also been recognised that the security officer's role also has to become more challenging - and more integrated within the host business - if quality performance is to be achieved and maintained. Within a better-paid and more dedicated security industry environment, quality staff will be at a premium and although money is critical, job satisfaction plays a major part in staff retention.

One of the benefits of 'Integrated Security' is that the security officer manages and reacts rather than tries to actively operate everything. Event driven systems no longer require an officer to peer into screens for hour after hour but allow time for continual refinement of business security and staff skills. An environment, if you like, where the security officers' involvement promotes 'ownership' and affords responsibility is more likely to achieve job satisfaction, thus making those officers less prone to move on somewhere else for a few pennies more.

John Julian CPP is a senior consultant at Ian Johnson Associates, the independent security and risk management consultancy (www.ija.co.uk)

This article appeared in the October 2003 edition of Security Management Today.

Page 2