

LIBRARY MATERIALS SECURITY

The following information was collected by Claudine Perrault, Director of the Estes Park Public Library, regarding a set of questions posted to Libnet on February 22, 2006.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seventeen libraries responded to this survey; fourteen public, one military, and two college. Five currently use a materials security system, and twelve either do not have one or are not fully using their system. The 3M security gate is most common; one library uses a security camera and signs as a deterrent. Three libraries are currently converting to RFID security.

Of the twelve libraries that have no security or erratic security, only two have plans to install or upgrade a system, four are considering RFID for the future.

Non-security libraries who had done a formal internal study found that loss rates from theft were 2-3%, while losses from "unreturned check-outs" were much greater.

The questions posted to Libnet were:

- 1) Who currently uses a materials security feature?**
- 2) What system do you use (RFID/gate, security strip/gate, etc.)?**
- 3) Who is not using a security feature? Why?**
- 4) Have you recently conducted an internal study to prove or disprove the economic (or PR) value of a security system?**

RESPONSES

We have quit using our tattle tale tape on any except the most expensive or likely to be stolen materials, both for time in processing and expense. Most of our lost items simply never come back after check out rather than being stolen outright. We tape wicca, witchcraft, sex, etc. as well as CD, DVD and VHS. Our security gates have been out of commission since Oct. and I did decide to order a refurbished unit. I like the occasional beep to keep folks guessing!

**Sandy Messick, sandy.messick@lajunta.lib.co.us
LaJunta Public Library**

Very timely question * we're looking at some of the same issues, but with our District efforts haven't been able to give them full attention. Here's a couple of quick answers....

- 1) FCPL uses materials security at our Main and Harmony locations (both FCPL locations).
- 2) We use 3m security strips/gates.
- 3) n/a
- 4) We are interested in studying this aspect, but probably won't go forward with it too much this year due to the District effort. Discussion to date have centered on stewardship of materials vs. other factors (economics is one * we could, for instance, make and maintain self-checks stations much more cheaply if we didn't have to support the 3m strip, but another factor is the idea that efficiency would increase for patrons and staff if the sensitizing/desensitizing steps were eliminated each time an item circs.

The idea of stewardship and doing what we can to prevent loss is strong at FCPL, and we hope to find a way to measure that with other factors to choose a course. RFID could be a solution for us once the security model improves, and the cost of tags decreases.

**Carson Block, cblock@fcgov.com
Ft. Collins Public Library**

We recently completed a full inventory and decided that since our loss rate is a meager 3%, it is unnecessary to install a security system.

**Barbara Brattin, bbrattin@telluridelibrary.org
Telluride – Wilkinson Public Library**

No security has ever been in place in the Elbert County Library District. Why? I presume cost has been the issue, and the small town nature of the branches may have led to believing security has not been an issue. No study conducted.

**Robb Heckel, director@elbertcountylibrary.org
Elbert Public Library**

I have always contended that library security systems are, at best, intimidation of the timid. All security systems have ways of working around them and the patron intent on

stealing an item will discover that rather early. From the public library's point of view (and bear in mind that I have been an academic librarian for 40 years so I can speak with great authority--ha!), there is frequently not as much emphasis on trying to keep everything you ever bought; thus, I would think that one could look at losses as a way of weeding the collection. It is sort of like doing a full inventory--does it make sense to inventory books that are probably worth less than \$10 each to verify that you have lost 5% of your collection over the past 10 years--probably not.

Here are some questions to answer:

- (1) How often does the theft alarm go off?
- (2) How often is it an oversight versus an intentional theft?
- (3) When the system goes off, does anyone really stop the person, or is the person "out the door and gone" before anyone can react?

To answer your specific questions:

- (1) We have a materials security system--an ancient Checkpoint system.
- (2) Much of the time the security alarms are not even working and we do not know it--in otherwords, do you verify each morning that your system is really working?
- (3) Given that we have 16 external doors to the library spread out over four floors, there is no way for the circulation staff or anyone else to monitor all the doors, which brings-up another question: how easy is it for you to monitor the effectiveness of the system? Now that I have rambled on about why I think they are a waste of time, I would probably used random security devices in what I thought may be high theft items.

**Edward A. Scott, Ph.D., Edward.Scott@usafa.af.mil
McDermott Library**

1) Have gates, but they are turned off.

2) We will be contracting very soon with SirsiDynix for ITG based RFID system which of course provides both self checkout and security. We did find out a lot about the various systems, via interviews with customers, so when and if you reach that point, we would be glad to share what we found.

3) The reason we turned ours off have to do with problems outlined in the attached document below: The context of this document is that we were about to put together our budget proposal for the following year. Some staff felt that we really needed security gates, some didn't. Before putting together a budget proposal, I wanted our staff to be unified in our thinking. The document outlines the problems or complaints I was receiving about security gates.

4) Yes. We did an inventory in 2004. I've included the results in a PDF attachment. The report is for items missing in inventory from 1987 through 2004. We did not have

security gates from 1987 to mid 1993. You will notice that the number of items missing during those years was 250-300. When we added the security gates in 1993, there is a big drop in missing items. You'll see numbers that are around 100 or so. But then the numbers start going up again in 2000, to 200-300. I can't remember the year that we shut off our security gates, but I think it was in 2002. Notice that the numbers did go up to around nearly 500. The reason 2004 shows only 167 is that it didn't reflect the whole year.

What this tells me:

Do security gates make a difference? Yes, they probably do. The numbers of missing items increased fourfold when the public figured out the gates weren't active. However, the reason I say probably is that there were many items over the years that were removed from the database because they were missing, and this report doesn't reflect that. Also, the amount of "theft" that comes from checking items out but never returning them is the greater problem than theft via the gates. But this information should give you some information to think about.

**Tony Brewer, Tony_Brewer@ci.longmont.co.us
Longmont Public Library**

- 1) Security camera system only.
- 2) We have security cameras and signs (this area under surveillance) in high theft areas (mostly DVD's and other media) as a deterrent.
- 3) We have recently stopped using our security strip/gate system for several reasons.
 - a) We needed to move to a mostly self-check circulation system that did not work with our security strips, and we can't yet justify the cost of RFID for all our locations.
 - b) We had trouble keeping all our gates functional, and trouble enforcing security even if the gate alarm went off.
 - c) Most actual thieves knew how to get around the system anyway, and more losses come from unreturned check-outs than from theft.
- 4) No, though we have recently embarked on a materials inventory system that will eventually tell us more about the economic impact.

**Eloise May, EMay@ald.lib.co.us
Arapahoe Library District**

We don't use any type of security feature AND we don't charge overdue fines. Our (8 year thus far) study indicates that we lose, on average, not quite 1 book/month due to theft and another third of a book each month due to delinquent patrons. All total, even the average cost doesn't exceed \$400/year and a couple years it has been much less.

In many cases the items stolen were up for discard either by attrition, newer edition expected, or duplicate copy discard. However, perhaps the overriding factor as to why we don't have a security system is that we are only total permanent staff of 3 and have dual entrances. Staffing two entrances is nearly impossible given our staffing configuration, hours of operation, and budget.

We have no plans of ever installing security. However, we are looking to adding a secured study room that would be staffed to allow for student use of items that we cannot afford to lose such as archive collections, collectible or highly expensive resources, instructor reserves, etc. This room will be right next to the main circ desk so keeping a watchful eye on it would be quite easy.

**Kendra Schwindt Swope, Kendra.Swope@ojc.edu
Wheeler Library, Otero Junior College**

The Grand County Library District has five branches and we do not use a security feature to protect materials in any of the branches. When the Fraser Valley Library was built (from 1996-1998) we considered it but could not afford it. Now we are building two new facilities in Granby and Grand Lake, neither of which will have a security feature to protect materials.

So the main reason we did not originally implement security was cost. But now we have added self-check machines, which would have made the security gate troublesome since patrons would be required to de-sensitize the materials themselves or the gate would sound despite the items being checked out by the patron.

When we first built our DVD Collection here at the Fraser Valley Library Branch, we kept the DVDs in jewel cases in the workroom and the empty DVD cases on the shelf. Each time patrons checked out DVDs, staff would move the DVDs from the jewel cases to the DVD cases. All of the time we spent doing this was to avoid theft of DVDs, which now cost about \$11 each. We changed this procedure almost a year ago. After 6 months, I did a loss inventory of the Adult DVD collection. Even I was surprised to learn that just 2 DVDs were missing without explanation (presumably stolen from the shelf), while 12 DVDs were checked out and never returned or paid for. The estimated total cost to the library for both was \$168.00.

While we do operate in a smaller community, we have a large number of seasonal workers who come in and out of town, so not all of our patrons have strong ties to the community. The DVD inventory I conducted convinced me that, if libraries have a decent media budget, they should concentrate on building their collections rather than worrying about what they lose.

**Anna Winkel, awinkel@gcld.org
Fraser Valley Library, Grand County Library District**

It is a hassle, isn't it? We have a 3M security gate that is 12 years old, and hyper-sensitive. It often goes off with AV materials even if we de-sensitize them. I haven't done an internal study to evaluate the system.

We are purchasing a 3M Self Check-out system with a separate desensitization "tunnel" for videos and DVDs, so hope that this will make our system more reliable.

Unfortunately, some members of our community and the nation at large make a security system necessary.

**Cathy Bosley, cbosley@fmllibrary.org
Ft. Morgan Public Library**

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- 1) JCPL does use a materials security feature.
 - 2) We are currently using 3M security strips and gates and will be moving to Bibliotheca's RFID system towards the end of 2006.
 - 3) n/a
 - 4) No we have not.

**Cindy Phillips, cphillip@jefferson.lib.co.us
Jefferson County Public Library**

We don't use a security system, mainly because I didn't want staff to become guards at the front door running after people, and because I don't think they deter people who really want to take the items, they just catch honest mistakes. I also noticed that in Front Range libraries very few staff actually go after people when the alarm goes off - which makes me wonder how effective they are. (I did my own experiment, carrying stripped books in my bag to intentionally set off the alarm to test the libraries' responses)

We have not done an internal survey.

**Michele Seipp, micheles@cityoflafayette.com
Lafayette Public Library**

We are currently using 3M security gate 3502. We are planning on installing another gate soon. We just replaced our old unit with the 3502 last summer.

We do not circulate our periodicals so the gates keep them in the library.

Jowanda CM Campion jowanda.campion@trinidadstate.edu

Trinidad State Junior College Library

Douglas County Libraries does not. On the basis of our in-house inventory, we lost less than 2% of our collection through theft -- a much higher percentage to people who checked things out, and didn't return them. Hence we hired a materials recovery service, rather than an electronic gate.

We use RFID at a new library, but will not use it for this kind of security. The "readers" operate reliably at an 18" depth, forcing us either to put up a narrow gate (working against the openness we're striving for) or make the detector so sensitive that it would confuse everybody's materials.

Anecdotally, I found that talking to other area librarians who used security system, they DIDN'T use them. Some had unplugged them. Why bother?

**Jamie LaRue, jarue@dclibraries.org
Douglas County Libraries**

Bemis/Littleton Public Library does. We are using 3M security gates with strips/targets in each item. We use locked cases on DVDs since without them they disappeared at an alarming rate.

We had to remove our gates last year for several months due to remodeling of our main entry. We considered not reinstalling them or putting them in and not turning them on as a deterrent. In the end, we put them back in because we could see lots of people walking out with items that we knew were not checked out.

We did not conduct a formal study but based our decision on direct observation. See response to # 3.

**Margery E. Smith, msmith@littletongov.org
Bemis/Littleton Public Library**

We're not. Frankly, when we were building our addition and preparing to automate, the security idea was somehow offensive to people. It was also relatively expensive, and so I didn't bother trying to make a case for it, although it would have made a lot of sense to process materials at that time, since we were handling everything for barcoding anyway.

I don't really know our losses. We'll be doing inventory this summer and that will be interesting. Once we get one automated inventory under our belt, we'll probably want to do it more often.

Now, I probably won't think about a security system until we move to RFID some day. I'm assuming we will, and so investment in another system to go with the barcodes seems a waste.

**Jeff Donlan, jdonlan@salidalibrary.org
Salida Public Library**

We are not currently using materials security in the Boulder Public Library system. We have security gates in place at our main library that detect tattle-tape but they do not work. We have turned them off. They are so old that 3M no longer offers service on them. We stopped putting tattle-tape in our new acquisitions in 2005. We have just begun investigating RFID. We have not conducted any internal studies about the value of a security system.

**Jennifer Miles, Access Services Manager milesj@boulder.lib.co.us
Boulder Public Library**