



# INTEGRATING FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY

Combining fire safety with surveillance is essential for protecting assets and property, says **Mariann McDonagh** of Xtralis

The relationship between fire and life safety personnel and physical security professionals is critical. Fire and life safety personnel are exclusively focused on monitoring sensors and alarms that identify the earliest presence of a fire in order to manage the threat it poses to building occupants. Physical security personnel have much broader visibility into all other areas of enterprise security using surveillance cameras, access control and environmental sensors and building management systems. However, fire and life safety personnel do not have the benefit of physical security's broader view of situational awareness.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, historically, fire and life safety systems have been stovepiped or siloed from all other physical security systems within a facility. Fire sensors and alarms run on dedicated proprietary networks that are managed by personnel outside the physical security team; typically by facilities or building management or life safety management. There is a rationale for this separation of fire and life safety and physical security. Local fire authorities and legislative bodies that establish fire codes have been reticent to integrate fire alarms with other security systems because of the priority these alerts must have above all others.

While this position on fire and life safety should never change, buildings, and the systems used to monitor and protect them, are becoming increasingly sophisticated. The growth in intelligent, standards-based fire and life safety, physical security and building management systems offers significant potential benefits as these two critical functions become integrated.

By integrating fire alarms with other physical security systems, fire and life safety personnel can benefit from the broader visibility provided by cameras, as well as a multitude of access control, environmental and security sensors. The true potential of this integration is realized when critical information is accessed in real-time through a single common interface that's shared among both life safety and security teams.

This common interface facilitates a more intelligent and informed response in the event of an emergency situation. Consider this - when a fire alarm system is integrated with surveillance cam-

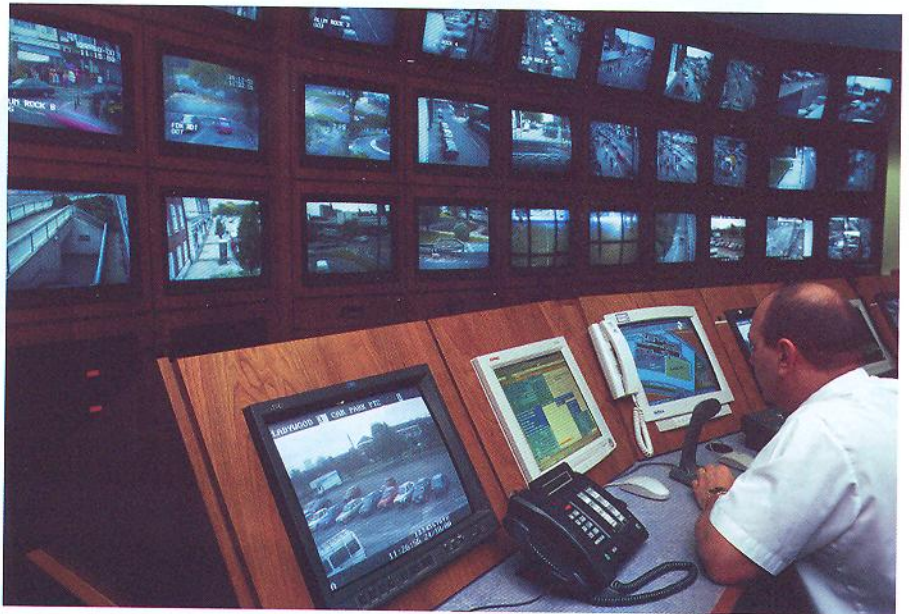
eras, it evolves from being a "blind" audible alert to a visual sensor that provides a window into an emergency scenario. If an alert is received from a fire detector, security personnel can immediately activate cameras in that area to see what is happening. They can pull up access control records and identify individuals who are in the area and then coordinate the appropriate and intelligent response. This type of integration is incredibly valuable as evacuations are coordinated and managed and first responders arrive on the scene.

Take the example of an expansive industrial manufacturing facility with multiple warehouses, produc-

ers can provide a full briefing of the situation and share live footage of the fire.

Another benefit of integrating fire and life safety and physical security functions stems from the establishment of common, comprehensive and coordinated security policies. Does it really make sense to have two separate procedures for evacuation depending on the situation? With fire and life safety coordinating closely with physical security a simplified set of unified security procedures can be established and enforced.

As more and more enterprise and security systems converge onto unified Internet Protocol (IP)



■ Xtralis FastTrace central monitoring station

tion floors, loading docks and administrative offices. If a fire begins to smolder in one of the warehouses, an early warning smoke detection system will activate the fire alarm. Security personnel, working in tandem with fire and safety managers, can isolate the alarm and focus surveillance cameras on the vicinity in order to assess the situation. Decisions can be made as to which suppression measures to take, which access control doors to block and which production facilities to shut down and evacuate. When fire fighters arrive on scene, fire and safety manag-

ers can provide a full briefing of the situation and share live footage of the fire. The integration of fire and life safety and physical security will bring about positive changes to safety procedures, improved visibility and heightened situational awareness for a coordinated and effective response to any emergency situation. **EFM**

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