



A Dangerous Blind Spot

Survey reveals few worry about the dangers of fire

As they say, out of sight out of mind—even when it comes to security.

In fact, a new survey from the Society for Fire Protection Engineers found that although the majority of Americans believe fire is a prominent threat to their home and family, very few actually worry about the dangers of fire.

The Great Disconnect

The survey, conducted in February with more than 1,000 participants, revealed that 45 percent of people believe fire is more of a threat than lightning strikes, hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. At the same time, only 18 percent of the respondents said they worry about the dangers of fire more than once a year. According to the SFPE, Americans are more likely to be harmed by fire when compared to other disasters. And although natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes are covered widely in the national news media, many more people die each year as a result of fire.

Each year in the United States, there are more than 1.5 million fires, many of which could be prevented, the SFPE reports. As a result, more than 3,000 people die and more than 17,000 are injured. Direct property loss due to fires is estimated to be more than \$10 billion a year, according to the report.

“We face widespread misconceptions about fire safety, and that’s worrisome,” said Chris Jelenewicz, engineering program manager at SFPE. “Everyone should recognize that thousands of people die each year in fires and be aware that fire safety features in a building play a critical in protecting people, property and the environment from fire.”

A Step Ahead

Luckily, people within the security industry recognize the importance of fire



safety. Today, innovation continues to push the limits of fire detection.

For example, officials at the Museum of London are well acquainted with the importance of protecting artifacts, visitors and staff from the threat of fire and damaging smoke. An icon at the heart of the city, the Museum of London aims to inspire a passion for all things London. It is one of the world’s largest urban history museums, with collections spanning prehistory to the present day. The lower galleries are undergoing major redevelopment work, and new galleries will be opening in 2010, telling the story of modern London from 1666 to the present day.

Steve Cox, head of facilities and security at the museum, said after years of using a closed-protocol fire alarm system, it was time for a change.

“We wanted to update the system and increase flexibility and control,” Cox said. “Due to the nature of our billing and the structural layout of the museum, the aesthetics of the system in some areas of the public galleries and spaces was a key requirement.”

Wessex Fire and Security, the museum’s installer, recommended the Xtralis VESDA and ICAM aspirating smoke detector systems, which took into account the buildings’ structural layout and aesthetic considerations. VESDA and ICAM are designed for use in environments with zero tolerance for fire—for example, the 2 million artifacts, and the visitors and staff, at the Museum of London.

Xtralis aspirating smoke detectors constantly sample the air for even the smallest of smoke particles, helping

to prevent a small fire from becoming a major incident. A network of pipes can be placed where the smoke is most likely to go, sensing smoke long before traditional detectors.


Cox said the museum went with the Xtralis VESDA solution for its superior protection of large open spaces over conventional point or beam detection systems. Meanwhile, the Xtralis ICAM technology is used in more confined, difficult to access spaces. Another important factor was the fact that the company’s ASD solutions can be unobtrusively deployed, which allowed the museum to preserve aesthetic features and keep scaffolding, ladders and workers to a minimum.

Cox said the biggest challenge during the project was to fit the new system installation around other renovations. That’s why the museum did the installation in phases, the first of which was completed in July. The second phase is ongoing.

Never Say Never

The Museum of London officials will surely benefit from their decision to take a proactive approach to fire detection. Cox said it’s already “reassuring to have a modern, up-to-date and fully flexible system” installed throughout the galleries.

It’s vital that security professionals—as well as individual home and business owners—begin to truly realize the dangers of fire and smoke. An attitude of “it won’t happen to me” is reckless and unrealistic.

Take a cue from the Museum of London—as well as St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament, which also use an Xtralis solution for fire detection—and face the fact that it could happen to you, at any time. 

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