



PRESENTS

Like Money in the Bank: A Primer on Count Room Security

Despite what you've heard about a "cashless society," cash is still king. As a result, most parking and toll industry veterans have likely heard the adage (or a variant), "The job's not done 'till the money's been run."

Collecting the money in the field is just the beginning of a transportation revenue professional's job. Revenue is considered "safe" only when it reaches the bank. Some operations choose to let a bank or security firm worry about sorting and counting their cash. Others must employ a secure count room to prepare their funds for deposit.

There's a lot to consider in adequately preparing a secure count room, say experts like William "Bill" Francis, whose parking auditing career has spanned nearly forty years. "The largest problem is when it is not a dedicated room, but instead used to serve other functions such as storing supplies and tickets; utilizing it as a break room or time clock location, etc. Any instance where other persons not participating in the count process require access."

Industry experts generally agree that shared use of a space for a number of different logistical tasks is potentially dangerous. It equates, for example, ticket storage, with revenue security. While both are

important, they are mission-critical in different respects and deserve their own separate resources. Taking shortcuts with count room security can have potentially disastrous results.

Hard Count, Soft Count, and Hand Counts

Different types of operations require different approaches in count room design. “Hard Count” operations are typical in many municipal operations where large volumes of heavy parking meter coins and tokens must be handled. “Soft Count” operations, such as event venues, often deal with mostly paper bills and cash equivalents, such as vouchers and passes. However, in some operations, large volumes of both must be accommodated.

One of the first threshold questions that must be considered is: Does the volume of hard or soft count revenues justify the expense of count machines?

Coin sorters can process hundreds of pounds of coin per hour, dividing them into denomination types and automatically filling large, pre-counted “Fed” bags that most banks now require for coinage deposits. Quality bill counters can flash count a dozen bills a second, reducing hand count times dramatically. Many models of these machines produce electronic and/or printed reports for an audit trail.



A typical coin counter deployed in parking and toll count rooms. This is a Cummins Allison Jet Sort model. Photo courtesy of The H2H2H Foundation.

Reducing hand count time reduces the time revenue is exposed on site to pilferage, burglary, and robbery. Mechanizing the process also saves on labor costs and increases count accuracy. However, the machines are expensive, require trained operators, occasionally jam, and need frequent cleaning. Also, these devices can be large and loud. Some operations supply their count technicians with earplugs because the decibel levels exceed safe ranges.

Still, even with these considerations, Francis recommends that if you're are going to commit to a count room, you should obtain "good,

high-end bill and coin counters accompanied by a thorough routine preventive maintenance plan.”

Candid Cameras: CCTV is Critical

Most count room security experts recommend extensive use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). These systems provide a credible deterrent to criminals, a safety tool for employees, and an investigative aid for police and management. But “CCTV from multiple angles, with digital recording and proper storage capabilities” is only the beginning, says Francis.

Cameras should cover the entire access path to the count room; for example, in the accompanying “Opinion” column entitled “Truth or Fiction”, it might be wise to place a camera outside the back door covering the door and the alley, where cash might be loaded or unloaded and potential threats could arise. In particular, a camera should always be installed outside the count room door.

Additionally, cameras should blanket the count room interior as well, not only to record intrusions but also to observe the behavior and hand movements of count room personnel. Some setups also utilize sound-enabled video for count room cameras, to record conversations and phone calls.

A monitor should be placed inside the count room so personnel can view the area outside the door and along the access path to the count room. This is helpful in allowing count room personnel to identify who is outside the door, verify when a cash delivery is being made, and notify authorities if delivery, pick-up, or armored car personnel are

waylaid by criminals. Other monitors should be considered for the manager's office and a central security office, if one exists, so the count can be randomly observed. CCTV footage should be stored for a minimum of thirty (30) days in a remote facility or "cloud" configuration to eliminate random tampering.

Some "Alarming" Developments

A panic alarm and/or phone should be installed inside the count room in case a threat is identified. At a minimum, a quick and easy fix is to ensure that a cell phone is available inside the count room – landlines can be cut - although dialing any phone under the duress of a threat in progress is difficult and may not be timely. Some operations use a dedicated count room cell phone with speed dial for police and/or security personnel.

Much faith is placed in the ability of alarm systems to deter theft. However, if phone lines outside the building are exposed, they can be easily severed before intruders enter. This would leave the count room unprotected, except possibly by audio alarm. A review of interior phone line exposure should be also performed with appropriate protective measures such as metal conduits added, if needed.

An alarm panel right by the count room door can communicate to an intruder where the money is located. Alarm panels should therefore be moved away from the count room, if possible, or near a number of secured doors, to keep unschooled intruders guessing. Alarm violations should be reported to a security company (or directly to police) as well

as management and should include a loud alarm that can only be canceled on site.

Experts suggest a motion detector for the interior of the count room, particularly if cash in partly-filled Fed bags, or other safes and moneys are kept on site overnight. Safe entry should be tied into the alarm system if possible. Likewise, access into all secure areas is preferably provided by electronic or biometric credentials tied into the alarm system, rather than commonly known passcodes and keys, which can be easily duplicated or misplaced.

Constructing and Furnishing Your Count Room

Count rooms should be easily accessible for loading and unloading large amounts of coin and cash, but it is also preferable that it be an interior room with no windows. It's best to minimize the distance – and therefore the time cash is exposed - between vehicle off-loading and the count room. In addition, instead of stairs and curbs there should be ramps and curbcuts for carts and dollies.

“Good air handling/exchange is crucial for the count room,” Bill Francis notes. In the accompanying Opinion column “Truth or Fiction”, parking personnel might have kept the back door open due to poor air circulation inside the parking office. A count room can become heated with a number of bodies in a confined space and operating machinery. It is poor practice to leave access doors or the count room door open at any time, but particularly while a count is underway.

The room itself should be of solid construction. Doors should be heavy duty metal with buried hinges. If CCTV is not available in the

hallway outside the count room, a peephole should be required, at a minimum.

Preferably, two doors should be configured together to create a “rat trap” requiring an outer door to be properly opened, closed, and locked before it is possible to open the inner count room door. Intruders who use fake credentials to improperly breach the outer door or who are recognized as threats can then be kept in the rat trap until authorities arrive.

Francis emphasizes the importance of having a secure ceiling, pointing out that even the strongest entry door can easily be bypassed by climbing up into a drop ceiling from outside the count room door and entering the count room from above. The room itself should have plenty of counter space that is open, flat, and easily seen by cameras, Francis suggests. Shelves, closets, and cabinets should be minimized or at least kept locked at all times during counts to avoid the possibility of hiding money or weapons.

Again, even if doors are strong, common wallboard is not much of an obstacle to criminals. Where walls are thin and easy break-in is possible, an overlay or cage of metal lattice could be added. Outside windows are not preferable, but if necessary they should also be covered with metal lattice on the outside.

Experts suggest periodically inspecting the exterior window casements for signs of tampering. Further, there should be heavy-duty locks on the interior side of the window. An additional set of bars, an interior lock or shaft jam should be added to secure the window from the inside.

Banking on Your Procedures

Even if your infrastructure lacks some of the above-described bells and whistles, reasonably good count room security can still be maintained via “strict step by step procedures to be followed to the letter,” says Francis.

If the count room abuts a parking office open to the public, all personnel should be on their guard when the count room is in operation. Casual visitors and service people should be discouraged from being in the office during counts, but if absolutely necessary, they should be kept at least one secured door away from the count room door.

A typical count room operation involves at least two counter technicians who monitor, document, and verify each other’s activities. Better yet, a supervisor is added in larger count rooms. With three counters involved, each batch of individually-numbered funds are counted by one technician, then the other. The supervisor then notes and resolves any discrepancies between the stated amounts posted by field personnel and actual amounts counted by each technician.

Once any issues have been resolved and documented, the individually-numbered funds are commingled with others and sorted for deposit. Final results are documented by all three persons, typically in writing and/or a spreadsheet.

All movements of people, equipment, and funds in and out of the count room should be documented, with employees individually signing in and out of the room and with counter signing for all transfers

of funds and paperwork between employees. Once a count has begun and cash is out and exposed, no one should enter or leave the count room. Of course, a count room door should never be opened for an unidentified party.

Drops, pick-ups, and meal/restroom breaks may need to be staged to accomplish this basic security tenet. Count room safes should require two keys, cards, or codes for entry, each under the control of two different people; therefore, scheduling of times to open and close safes is important as well.

Counting on Your People

The challenges of count room operations require a well-trained, technically-minded employee who can work well under stress and handle the pressure of emergency situations. Where possible, rotation of employees helps in avoiding complacency and burnout. Rotations should be performed without notice, if feasible.

Careful pre-employment screening should take place, including credit checks where legally permissible. Management should always be vigilant for any signs of personal or financial stress in the work lives of count room employees. Physical requirements should be clearly communicated upon hire; hoisting large Fed bags, bulky coin canisters, and heavy cash bags is often part of the job.

“Count room employees should not be allowed to bring personal items (wallets, purses, radios, magazines, books, etc.) into the count room,” suggests Francis. He adds they should also be subject to random audits during the counts to ensure cash is not being diverted

into pockets, personal items, stashed in nearby cabinets for later retrieval, or taped under the table. To this end, count room employees should always keep their hands above the table level as much as possible.

It is critical to obtain all keys from count room employees upon termination and to change locks for keys that can be copied. Locks and other codes that provide access to the count room should be changed periodically as well, even if there is no turnover of staff.

Also remember that they don't call it filthy lucre for nothing. Money is germmy and dirty, so provision should be made to supply your employees with gloves and/or waterless hand cleaner.

Conclusion

None of the actions recommended above can prevent a determined, professional criminal gang from “rolling over” your count room; however, you can slow them down while deterring the casual, opportunistic, or “inside job” thief. Hopefully, the ones truly committed to crime will go rob someone else where the pickings are easier.

While these suggestions may seem burdensome and expensive, the result of a major incident can be more than the mere loss of money; count room security is also an issue of workplace safety. However, costs of performing counts in-house the “right” way should be compared to the expense of outsourcing this task to banks, security companies, and/or armored car services.

Either way, the job's not done 'till the money's been run.

* © 2016 THE H2H2H FOUNDATION SOME RIGHTS RESERVED. This White Paper in our “How-2” series was adapted from an article previously published in the International Parking Institute’s *The Parking Professional* magazine and is reprinted with permission of the author. You may distribute this document in this original format. The text in this work is licensed to you under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, please visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>. This license also allows you to quote any or all of the material or text in our “How-2” series, but only if you: 1) state the title of the specific article; 2) attribute authorship to the H2H2H Foundation at H2H2H.org; and, 3) provide a link to the license. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material in any way, you may not distribute the modified material without our prior approval. Any images must be separately credited and licensed. If you have questions, comments, or would like to use our material in any other manner, please contact us at info@h2h2h.org.

