

Town of Marshfield balances privacy and protection with Axis. Historic town gives first responders critical situational awareness with specially designed network cameras.



Organization:
Town of Marshfield

Location:
Marshfield,
Massachusetts, USA

Industry segment:
Government

Application:
Situational awareness

Axis partner:
SituCon Systems

Mission

When police unraveled a Columbine-like plot that included a planned assault on emergency first responders, it forever changed the psyche of the quaint seaside town of Marshfield, Mass. The police department and emergency management agency wanted to improve public safety by installing video cameras in several high-risk public buildings. But since cameras were going into areas where they weren't historically permitted, they needed to safeguard the privacy of citizens and town employees.

Solution

SituCon Systems, an Axis partner in Port Washington, N.Y., deployed more than a dozen Axis pan/tilt/zoom (PTZ) network cameras in the town hall, recreation center, library and airport. They encased each camera in a special SituCam Privacy Protecting Enclosure, which provides a mechanical cover over the lens to guarantee privacy.

Whenever a town employee activates a wireless "Instant Alert" button during a security event, the cameras' "eyelids" open so that dispatchers and police can remotely monitor the location and evaluate the situation before they arrive on scene. To prevent hacking or security risks, the wireless network is only accessible during an incident.

Result

Marshfield appreciates the feeling of safety the system creates. When a disgruntled citizen aggressively confronted a town council member after a vote, the Town Administrator hit the wireless alert button to activate the new network video system, giving Marshfield police the situational awareness they needed to quickly respond and deflate a highly-charged situation.

"Axis cameras with SituCam Privacy Protecting Enclosures give us the situational awareness we need to protect first responders and citizens in an emergency situation. Now we can see what we're up against before we arrive at the scene."

Bill Sullivan, Chief of Police for the town of Marshfield.

Balancing privacy with public safety

With violence on the rise in town buildings across the U.S., Marshfield felt it needed to enhance its conventional 9-1-1 system to further ensure employee and public safety. Because of privacy restrictions, likely targets such as the selectmen's meeting room in the Town Hall were strictly off limits for a traditional video surveillance system.

Marshfield found its answer with SituCon Systems' innovative Privacy Protecting Technology. The SituCam enclosures provide mechanical eyelids over Axis cameras, including AXIS 215 PTZ Network Cameras. In the privacy protecting mode, the eyelids remain closed, making it clear that the cameras are not in use. In the awareness mode, the eyelids open to allow the cameras to transmit video and other critical information to 9-1-1 dispatchers.

Wireless alert buttons allow town employees to instantly notify police of an incident and automatically initiate recording by the network cameras. Information about the person who pressed the alert button – including their photo, cell phone number and location – are displayed for the dispatcher with the video. Marshfield has also chosen to automatically activate the cameras after-hours, using embedded intelligent video motion detection to deter vandalism or theft.

"This one-of-a-kind system solved our greatest challenge by allowing us to place cameras in sensitive locations where we never could before," says Bill Sullivan, Chief of Police for the town of Marshfield. "It also saved us the time and expense of continually monitoring cameras all day long."

Tapping an existing data network

Each SituCam enclosure comes with a "drop in" ceiling tile and uses a single Ethernet cable to attach to the town's existing network. SituCam's Power over Ethernet (PoE) circuitry allows AXIS 215 Network Cameras to be PoE-compliant cameras. This simplified deployment, enabling town personnel to install the cameras literally overnight when the facilities were closed.

"We also developed sophisticated software to instantly provide critical information about the person who initiated the alarm as well as automatically alter bandwidth usage depending on the event," explains Seth Cirker, president of SituCon Systems. "This flexibility allows us to accommodate the varied capacities of wireless and wired networks."

Acquiring knowledge first hand

In a typical emergency, a 9-1-1 dispatcher's job is to get as much detail as possible. Information is often sketchy since those in the middle of the event are often under extreme duress and not communicating clearly. In many cases, telephone access to 9-1-1 is not available – however, the "Instant Alert" button is always at hand.

With the new SituCams in place, Marshfield responders can monitor the cameras remotely to acquire first-hand knowledge of the situation. "It's the difference between someone describing a Van Gogh painting versus seeing the painting for yourself," explains Chief Sullivan.

Video control is also essential for police during a critical situation. Once video has been initiated by the alert button and real-time information concerning the town employee and their location has been sent, the dispatcher and first responders can then remotely control the Axis camera's PTZ controls to identify who is in the room – town employees, innocent bystanders and potential perpetrators – and other critical details such as weapons or suspicious packages.

Once officers arrive at the building, they continue monitoring the cameras through wireless handheld devices before entering the room. "Giving responders a real-time view of what's going on has the potential to save lives and diminish the amount of damage done by people who may be acting out," states Chief Sullivan.



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