

# Security versus Safety – The Challenges of a Security Protection Officer

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## 1. The Challenging Role of Protection Officers

Over the last 15 years, workplace safety responsibilities have been added to the protection officers' job description. Safety and Health requirements have been imposed and regulated many years ago by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health in Malaysia. Unfortunately, there is a long-standing bias toward security personnel that must be overcome. Security employees are often viewed as “second class citizens”, who are among the lower paid levels within an organization. In other cases, they are minimum-wage contract security personnel. The common term “security guard” connotes a static object rather than a human exercising discretionary judgment. In my opinion, the “g” word (“guard”) should be removed from our vocabulary and a process of professionalizing security officers must begin immediately.

One obvious and immediate measure which should be taken is to change the job titles of security personnel. Simply said, “security officer” is a vast improvement over “security guard.” Unfortunately, the term “security” also has negative — or simply limiting — connotations. “Protection officer” is certainly a better term, as it is more reflective of the scope of their functions. It can help to give officers the pride and professional identity they need to function effectively.

## 2. Enforcement and Intelligence

Enforcement is where the protection officer's role has expanded. Contemporary protection officers assume a much greater enforcement role than ever before. Private protection officers safeguard shopping complexes, hotels, resorts, casinos, hospitals, and many other public spaces. Safety, traffic control and crime issues are just some of the challenges they face in these facilities.

Concepts such as “community policing”, “problem-oriented policing” and “zero-tolerance policing” are becoming the dominant way of life in many cities. Private security firms can also be harnessed to combat major criminal activities and terrorism. Private protection officers are therefore in a position to help uncover serious security threats. Protection officers are on the front lines in the fight against crime. They often contribute intelligence and preliminary investigative information to public law enforcement entities. In many cases, security officers at retail stores and shopping complexes are responsible to apprehend criminals before turning them over to the police. This may not be fully recognized or appreciated — either by the public, facility management, or academia. When all is said and done regarding the responsibilities of protection officers, they obviously play an important role in public safety.

## 3. Roles of Protection Officers

In a broad sense, protection officers fulfill four basic roles within the organizations they protect. They are:

- **Management representative**

The officers meet and greet visitors and assist members of the public in different ways — from being an information booth for shoppers to helping guests, patients, and visitors with parking problems. On major events, protection officers can assist to manage media representatives. Protection officers can be a conduit

for management-employee relations during routine operations. During crisis, emergencies or periods of labor unrest, the function of the protection officer can be more dynamic to assist the management in various ways.

- **Enforcement/compliance agent**

The protection officers enforce the rules established by facility management and must fully understand the rules and the rationale behind them. They also must understand the legal standards to be enforced, including applicable criminal laws and administrative agency regulations. In fulfilling the enforcement function, protection officers' diplomatic skills must be polished to avoid unnecessary discord. Officers must fully understand organizational philosophy and remain supportive of the management. To accomplish this, the supervisor of the protection officers should be engaged by the management team regularly.

- **Legal consultant**

While this role is often unappreciated, modern security personnel often make decisions and judgments in their day with legal consequences. Criminal law violations, the avoidance of civil liability and the adherence to standards and regulations are issues protection officers address daily. Privacy rights of visitors and employees and contractual obligations are other issues often encountered. Simply memorizing and following an organization's policies does not adequately prepare protection staff — they need education regarding legal concepts.

- **Intelligence agent**

In the role of intelligence agent, it is critical the protection officer be aware of what to look for that could be out of the ordinary. He must be intimately familiar with the normal operations in the protected environment to pinpoint any type of potential problem — be it a safety, public image, employee relations, espionage, or crime. Protection officers must be educated on public and employee relations and safety. They must have a heightened level of awareness regarding indications of espionage, criminal behavior, gang activity and extremism/terrorism. They must also effectively exchange information with police and other government agencies who have information regarding these issues.

#### 4. Security Versus Safety

The differences between security and safety are not significant. Both are conditions where one is well protected and without risks. The basic idea of both is protecting assets from hazards/threats and creating safe/secure conditions. The condition safety is about *being protected*, while the condition security is about *being free from danger*. The differences between being protected and being free from danger or threat are not easily seen. Being protected leads to a condition of being free from danger or threat and being free from danger or threat can imply good protection. *Thus, the basic idea is the same for both.*

It seems like one slight difference between security and safety is that **security specifically protects against crime, while safety specifically protects human lives and health**. However, I do not think this distinction is adequate. Protection of human lives and health can be protection against deliberate (and criminal) acts such as murder attempts and violence. When an unintended accident at an industrial plant/factory happens, it might be a violation of the OSHA Act, which per definition is a criminal act. Taking shortcuts to get more efficient work and less workload are deliberate incidents as well, which might lead to an accident at an industrial plant.

Ignorance of procedures leading to an accident is a deliberate incident as well. Thus, it will not be fully correct to say that safety is protection against unintended incidents. It is about time to end this discussion before it gets even more confusing. It is definitively complicated to distinguish safety and security. The basic idea is the same in both understandings, *protecting assets from a possible hazard or threat*. Thus, it might be unnecessary to distinguish them. A slight difference seems to be that; security is related to criminal

acts (espionage, theft, terrorism) and that safety is related to the risk of injury of humans. As discussed above neither deliberate nor unintended incidents are directly associated with criminal incidents or injuries. What the differences are, remains as a question.

## **5. Causes**

Security relates to those problems where people act deliberately to gain profit or create harm. Hence, incidents are most often a result of a persons or a groups' will. A safety incident usually has several contributors, such as bad conditions or several unintended actions. The accident is then a result of these contributors working together, which is outside the control of one person. Security incidents are results of planned action i.e., acting in way to achieve a wanted outcome (money etc.); while safety accidents are unplanned (no one plans to cut his finger in a saw machine). The security incidents are mainly malicious and criminal acts. Safety accidents are seldom, if ever, malicious, but they can be criminal as they often are violations against regulations.

## **6. Losses**

The losses within industrial safety are injuries and death of people/employees, damage of the environment, material/production costs, delays in delivery and loss of reputation. The safety field is also related to reliability of industrial assets. The range of consequences is broad for security; the losses are mainly related to physical assets and information. The losses are to a large extent directly related to economical loss (loss of income/materials, loss of technology, loss of man-hour, loss of reputation, insider incidents with financial gain as aim). It is easier to replace the losses within security than within safety, as it is easier to replace stolen assets through insurance (if insured) than to bring back a human life.

## **7. Uncertainty**

The uncertainty dimensions of the threats are much more present within the field of security than in safety. This uncertainty on threats and consequences in security is created due to:

- High degree of complexity in information technology systems
- Unforeseen and unwanted interactions
- Non-proximity of threats, threats beyond sight
- External threats are difficult to predict and control
- Deliberate threats (internal/external) are difficult to predict
- Broad range of threats
- Change of technology
- Need for knowledge to understand the information technology

## **8. Surroundings**

The security field is more regulated as well as affected by the society, than what is the case of safety. Security problems reflect the society through its social structure, economic conditions, its perception of law and crime, and its morality. Security is relevant for a wide range, if not all, companies, while safety is most relevant for the industry and transporting sector. For certain company or organization, security will be more important and critical than safety. Everybody deals with security in some way – locking your door is security. “Security holds a mirror up, not to nature, but to society and its institutions”, reflects the aspect that humans, as members of society and institutions, are precisely what we are protecting ourselves from.

## 9. Summary of Comparison

### A. Similarities

The basic ideas of industrial safety and security are the same; both are protecting assets from hazards/threats creating safe/secure conditions. Nevertheless, there are some nuances that distinguish them. By taking these nuances into consideration it is possible to coordinate security and safety management. In addition, security management can learn from safety management, especially on the field of organizational aspects.

### B. Differences

Differences between security and safety are presented in **Table 1** below.

Security	Safety
Something that secures and offer protection	The condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury, or loss of life
That which secures or makes safe; protection; guard; defense	Freedom from unacceptable danger, risk, or harm
An incident is most often a result of one person or a group of people	An incident is most often a result of human behavior in combination with the environment
Causes often planned actions	Causes often unplanned actions
Related to criminal acts	Often related working environment
Mainly malicious acts	Seldom, if ever, malicious
Mainly deliberate acts with a wish of a wanted output/consequence of the act	Mainly deliberate acts without a wish of a wanted output and accidental incidents
More difficult to identify hazard	Hazard easily identified
External and internal human threats	Internal human threats
Threats are not always observable, tangible, and proximate	Hazards are observable, tangible, and proximate
Loss is mainly related to physical assets and information	Loss is related to human injuries/death and reliability of industrial assets
Reflects the state of society through its structures, economic situation, law abiding and moral	Includes physical and environmental conditions – not only humans and society
Relevant for a wide range and border-less	More relevant in the working environment
Modus operandi applicable to any organization	May differ with different industry

**Table 1: Main differences between security and safety**

## 10. Security versus Safety Challenging Issue - Exit doors

The terms safety and security often go together, but when it comes to site security in sectors such as manufacturing, the oil industry, and other hazardous operations, the two issues are in many ways diametrically opposed. Preventing physical intrusion onto sites is a major security issue, but it is one which can often be at direct odds with the other crucial issue of safety – in the very broadest terms, security requires that sites be locked and guarded, whilst safety often demands the exact opposite; those sites are left open for ease of escape.

Meeting the requirements of both safety and security can be a difficult balancing act, but it is by no means impossible. To establish requirements for physical security and guarding, the initial step is an analysis of potential threats. What reasons require that access to sites must be restricted, or who are the persons who might attempt to gain unlawful access?

The most obvious risk is fire and explosion, which might be deliberate or accidental, criminal or terrorism. Arson is a common cause of industrial fires, sometimes by persons who merely “get kicks” from creating a fire, or alternatively by someone with a grudge (dismissed employees featuring highly in this category). A fire is often started as a way of concealing evidence of some other crime. However, risk is assessed not only on likelihood of occurrence, but also on the potential severity – in this respect, sectors like the oil industry undoubtedly scores highly as a target.

When protecting sites by walls or fences, adequate provision must be made for emergency escape routes. Approved fastenings only can be open from inside can be used, or interlocks with the alarm system. Access by the emergency services should also be considered. Good access control is therefore a point to consider, ensuring that nobody unwanted simply walks in the gate. Swipe cards can be used for access control. Protection officers controlling access to the site can also undertake other tasks relating to site safety, like induction of contractors and reminding persons entering the site about the risks of carrying potential incendiary devices e.g., matches, lighters, and mobile phones.

Proper training of protection officers also leads to more competent front-line staff who can improve both safety and security. With careful consideration and planning, safety need not compromise site security and vice versa.

As part of an effort to increase security, many buildings are installing electronic card-access devices at internal doorways, designated fire stairs, and new electronically controlled turnstiles in the lobby. Workers must swipe their cards to exit and enter certain areas. This raises a couple of questions. If any of these devices were to fail, would employee access to exit routes be hindered? Do these devices constitute an obstructed access to an exit?

These devices are allowed if they are equipped with an approved entrance and egress control system, provided the following criteria are met:

1. One of the following shall be provided:
  - i. A sensor on the egress side, arranged to detect an occupant approaching doors that are arranged to unlock in the direction of egress upon detection of an approaching occupant or loss of power to the sensor.
  - ii. Listed panic hardware or exit hardware that when opened, unlocks the doors.
2. Loss of power to the part of the access control system that locks the doors shall automatically unlock the doors in the direction of egress.
3. The doors shall be arranged to unlock in the direction of egress from a manual release device. The manual release device shall be readily accessible and clearly identified by a sign that reads "Push to Exit."
4. When operated, the manual release device shall result in direct interruption of power to the lock, independent of the access control system electronics, and the doors shall remain unlocked for not less than 30 seconds.
5. Activation of the building fire-protective signaling system, if provided, shall automatically unlock the doors in the direction of egress, and the doors shall remain unlocked until the fire-protective signaling system has been manually reset.

6. Activation of the building's automatic sprinkler or fire detection system, if provided, shall automatically unlock the doors in the direction of egress, and the doors shall remain unlocked until the automatic sprinkler or fire detection system has been manually reset.

## **11. Conclusion**

This article has discussed similarities and differences between safety and security; they are both about protecting assets from threats/hazards. The main differences found in the discussion as shown in **Table 1**. The discussions of security and safety have led to a possible definition of security. By taking the differences between security and safety into consideration, it is possible to use safety management strategies in security management as well. Coordination of security and safety management is possible, and we need both to ensure an efficient and well managed site.

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