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Updated: October 28th, 2004 10:58:12 AM

Background Testing: A Primer for Dealer/Installer Companies

A Q&A with Vector Security

Geoff Kohl, SIW Editor
SecurityInfoWatch.com

In the headlines recently is the sordid story of an alarm installation gone bad. The case is set in Riverhead, N.Y., just south of the Long Island Sound. It began with a high-end residential install that featured motion detectors and a home CCTV system that featured tiny, hidden cameras. The job was performed by a local firm, Safeguard Alarm Co., and installed by Daniel Pelosi, who is now accused of murdering the multimillionaire banker whose home he had recently "secured." More twisted than that, Pelosi then wed the widow of the murdered banker.



Louise Urbanek (center), flanked by (left) Rose Kibler, HR coordinator, and (right) Jane Zeppuhar, payroll manager, says that background checks are especially important for employees of security companies.

While Pelosi hasn't been convicted yet -- he is currently on trial, it underscores the value of knowing who your employees are. SecurityInfoWatch.com shared this story with Louise Urbanek, vice president of human resources for Pittsburgh-based Vector Security, which provides services for both residential and commercial security. We recently spoke with Urbanek to get her thoughts on employee background screening. From what she tells us, you'd be foolish not to do extensive checks on all your employees.

SIW: What is the background check policy at Vector Security?

Urbanek: We at Vector do criminal background investigations for all our new hires. It does not matter who they are -- vice president, front desk, or installer -- they are checked. We check every applicant. If we consider three possible applicants, we will do checks on all of them. We do an all-inclusive check with federal and state felony records included as it helps us make our hiring decision. We also do a pre-employment drug screening.

SIW: In terms of hiring delays, what can a company expect in turn-around time for background and drug usage checks?

Urbanek: The background checks usually take two to three days, and the drug test usually takes two to three days as well once you factor in obtaining and shipping the specimen. We do drug tests for pre-employment purposes, and for post-accident tests, and "for cause" or reasonable suspicion tests, and we also have a random testing program.

SIW: What can HR managers at security companies expect in terms of cost?

Urbanek: A driving report costs us about \$16. The background check costs between \$35 and \$50. The drug test costs \$48.

SIW: With Vector, your company has multiple locations. How does the background research work? Is it done via the corporate office or at the individual locations?

Urbanek: We have a total of 18 offices, and each office operates autonomously. In each branch is an HR administrator, someone who is trained on how to do the background checks and how to check references. They are trained on what to look for, and when to ask for help [from our office].

SIW: In terms of the security or alarm company industry, is Vector Security's program the norm?

Urbanek: I think we do more drug testing than most companies. When we started in 1992, we were one of a few security companies doing this testing. Companies that don't do background screening may have legal exposure in a number of different areas. And if a company doesn't do background screening, it's probably because it doesn't know what the consequences could be. Usually, people are not aware of the legal issues [posed by employees], such as theft, harassment or false worker's comp claims. You have to try to weed out those people beforehand.

SIW: Besides the limits in liability, what kind of value do you find in background testing?

Urbanek: I think it allows us to have more qualified people who share our same philosophy. It allows us to avoid people who have been involved with the law. It's hard to measure that [benefit of performing background checks], but the benefits of making good hires cannot be understated. Every employee represents your company, whether they're on the phone or in the customer's house.

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