The Ultimate Guide To Self-Storage Facility Security

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The Ultimate Guide to Self-Storage Facility Security

When did you last check or update your security?
If you've had your systems in place for a while now, you could be missing out on efficiencies from time-saving integrations and newer technologies.

01 Why Do You Need Security?

Simply, it's the most fundamental expectation that your customers have, they are placing their goods in your care and they expect them to be secure and protected from theft and vandalism. Reputational loss from your units being broken into is hard to come back from, let alone the rocketing cost of insurance premiums after such an event. Burglaries, vandalism, and theft are at the top of a self-storage owner's concerns.

01. Why do you need security?

The pandemic has led to an increased requirement for storage, from commercial storage with businesses downsizing large offices to smaller + storage units, to adult children moving home and houses not being large enough to cope or during house moves, to new and fledgling entrepreneurs looking for a cost-effective base to store stock and work from. It's also sadly led to an increase in live-in renters which must be dealt with immediately when it occurs.

Instead of seeing security as a costly requirement, instead view getting security right as an opportunity that can be leveraged to ensure full occupancy and to protect business continuity. It can be a point of differentiation between you and your competition.

02 How Do You Assess What Security You Need For Your Self-storage Facility?

When assessing what's required, we recommend coming at a needs assessment from 3 differing points of view.

- **Your customers'**
- **Your teams'**
- **Your potential intruders'**

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

All three of these groups have different priorities and requirements.
Your customers want a site to be easy to access and navigate whenever they want to while feeling secure and being signposted, clean, and well lit.

Your team wants easy to manage security that doesn't require them to monitor it 24/7, access control that's easy to update and reliable and CCTV / anti-intrusion measures that alert them proactively if there is a problem and provide irrefutable evidence if needed.

Your potential intruders', well they want you to overlook weaknesses in your perimeter security, to have blind spots and old fashion entry systems that are easy to bypass or hack and a slow to respond to incursions mentality; they want you to make it easy for them.

● Site Perimeter Security
Fencing & Lighting

It's a given that you'll need secure fencing. How robust, how high and the material will likely be determined by the type of storage you offer.
Storage for boats, campers, or classic cars will be a tempting prospect for thieves, they need to be strongly deterred at the perimeter, we would recommend climb-resistant fencing, topped with razor wire.

Motion-activated lighting inside the fence is energy efficient and adds to the deterrent. The flight tendency is strong when you're suddenly bathed in bright white light rather than shrouded in shadows after you've climbed over a fence.

Traditional units rather than open vehicle storage may not need such strong measures but what is certain is that you want potential intruders' first impression to be that it's not going to be feasible to get in and out without being challenged.

You also want your renters to gain the impression that your site is impenetrable and more secure than your competition's.

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

● Site Perimeter Security
Perimeter CCTV

One of the best deterrents is large, obvious, and plentiful signage that details that monitored CCTV is in operation 24/7 and images are being recorded. This is also a legal requirement for the UK GDPR.

Cutting edge IP CCTV coupled with an AI NVR is one of your most effective security measures. The latest TIOC (Three-in-one) camera systems allow you to draw a virtual perimeter around your site. You can set this to be active between certain times and to trigger when the line is crossed one way or both. The smart sensors only pick up people or vehicles, so foliage or animals are no longer going to cause false alarms as they did in the past. Footage is in full colour whether it's day or night.

The response to an activation can include one, or all, of the following measures:

A flashing light (red/ blue)
A loud siren
An automated vocal warning
A live monitoring operator challenging the intruder vocally via the two-way microphone in real-time
Notifications to key holders or the ARC monitoring centre.

Only a truly determined thief is going to continue when faced with such a comprehensive response. If they do, then the response protocol is already triggered before they have gained access to any units or vehicles, giving the best chance of limiting loss and damage.

Be aware: organised thieves may well test your security in advance. If you have a false alert, or a couple within a short space of time, redouble your vigilance and monitoring procedures. Check outside any areas that showed activations for evidence of incursion or loitering.

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

● Gate Access Control

Automated gate access reduces the need for personnel and ensures only authorised vehicles can enter and exit.

LPR (Licence plate recognition) cameras, also known as ANPR (automatic number plate recognition), identify the vehicle's plate and link to your access control system. If this is integrated with your self-storage management software*, it will save time and improve controls because non-payers' vehicles can be suspended with a couple of clicks, meaning they can't empty their unit surreptitiously.

New renters can be added to the management software and their vehicles will automatically be allowed access when they approach the gate.

It makes a great first impression to renters, if the first time they approach your site having signed up online, the gate or barrier automatically opens for them!

It's necessary to have a secondary access control method in case of temporary vehicles or one-off deliveries.

Bluetooth smartphone proxy readers are a great option and more secure than a pin code entry system.

Pin codes are never changed regularly enough and are often easy to guess (1966 is still the most popular 4-digit pin code in the UK after 1234), they aren't a secure method of access control. For them to be effective you need to change the code every time a member of staff changes, or a renter, cleaner etc etc should no longer be allowed access.

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

Some sites have an 8- 16 digit pin code system – which no one can remember and everyone has saved on their phone which they have to refer to, attempt three times because their fingers slip etc.. why not just cut out the code and use the smartphone as the access credential? It's a much better experience for your renters.

Create a virtual 'badge' and grant access via a smartphone; it's specific to an account and parameters can be set so it's only valid for a certain period, or at certain times of the day or night. It's also a flexible, secure and easily manageable system for your team.

On-site Security

We've identified the core components of a great security system for the perimeters of your site, how does that continue once inside?

● Lighting & Signage

All areas where your team or renters will regularly traverse must be well lit; we recommend motion activated lighting. Not only for health and safety purposes, but it also reassures renters and adds to the sense of security.

Be mindful of energy consumption and think about how people move around the area.

Clear signage improves your users' experience, just because you know your way around the site, doesn't mean they know the peculiarities of the numbering of units!

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

● Access Control

Granular level access requirements will depend on your site, the layout and usage. The key is to make it simple for your renters to use, easy for your team to administer and difficult for thieves to infiltrate!

● Building Access

If your units are within a building, then an intruder still has two more layers of security to get through after your perimeter detection before they can start to steal anything.

To enter the building Bluetooth smartphone proxy readers are a great option again. Fast, efficient and with the ability to be tailored to an account level. If you have users without a smartphone, proximity cards or fobs can be issued as a last resort. Fingerprint scanners are also installed for high-end facilities that want to definitively guarantee that only authorised users can access the internal areas. Office areas containing personnel records or customer data can be protected with biometric access control – face scanners or fingerprint readers which should work in harmony with the same software as other types of readers installed.

● Intruder Alarm

If you are operating restricted hours rather than 24/7 access then it's likely you will need an intruder alarm. Your insurance company will advise what grade of alarm is required. Alarms will have a basic range of sensors including door contacts, glass break sensors, and PIRs. Newer systems also have flood detectors, CO2 detectors and PIRs with cameras (the quality is nowhere near as good as a standalone CCTV camera though).

02. How do you assess what security you need for you self-storage facility?

- ### Unit Access and intruder alarm
  #### Access Control

The options are varied and will depend on your site's target market. Padlocks with keys, combination padlocks, keypads or Bluetooth readers are all tried and tested methods. All have benefits and drawbacks; we recommend a security audit to ascertain which is the best access control system and hardware for your self-storage site.

- ### Unit Access and intruder alarm
  #### Intruder Alarm

Does every unit need an alarm? Probably not, unless you're offering very high end, climate-controlled storage. However, unit alarms could be offered as an optional extra if renters are storing valuable items. Rental options of a wireless alarm which is easy to install and uninstall at the end of a contract (and by your team) add an extra level of security and peace of mind for customers. They can also combat intrusion through a back wall into a unit as they will detect any movement within rather than movement along the main corridors as with CCTV.

- ### Unit Access and intruder alarm
  #### CCTV and Monitoring

How do you choose the right cameras and CCTV recorder?
Your self-storage facility needs full CCTV coverage of all external areas, all access points to any buildings and the entrance to the site. Internally there should be coverage of all areas including loading and unloading bays, reception and office areas.

03 What is the Purpose of a CCTV System in a Self-storage Facility?

It acts as a deterrent to poor behaviours or theft. It provides irrefutable evidence in the event of an incident; this could include a health and safety accident, or theft or burglary. It allows you to monitor site when you're not there.

The range of CCTV camera systems is dizzying; do you choose bullet or dome, IP or analogue, PTZ (pan, tilt, zoom), ANPR, vandal-proof or covert, 4k, wireless… the list goes on.

There is a lot of misinformation about CCTV systems; (if you want to find out more you can read our myth busting guide here).

It's always important to start with the end in mind. You want the system to be able to achieve the 3 points above. That means making sure that all areas are covered with cameras that provide good enough quality footage, whether it's day or night, to identify an individual, or a vehicle and what happened. That doesn't always mean choosing the highest specification camera, it could mean the one with the best lens size for the range you want to view, auto-tracking ability, the best one for low light recording, the one with flashing lights and siren to scare off an unauthorised intruder.

03. What is the purpose of a cctv system in a self-storage facility?

We'd recommend you get an expert audit of your site and requirements; you are an expert in self-storage; your security installer is an expert in recommending the right camera and system for the job. You may end up over specifying if you do it yourself, lured by 4k CCTV systems that are purported to be 'the best' but in fact sometimes handle motion less well than lower resolution cameras.

Your security installer will assess where to site cameras to get maximum coverage with the fewest cameras. They'll make sure potential blind spots are covered, and that cameras are either out of reach or vandal proof. They'll assess changes in light levels and smart IR requirements to prevent over-exposure. They'll recommend where the NVR should be housed to ensure it's secure and what hard drive or cloud storage you need to record for as many days as you wish.

A good security installer will set up and commission any routines or virtual tripwires on the system and train your team in how to use the system and download footage.

You should have access to an app so you can see your site when you're not there, or check on activations out of hours. You'll get push notifications for alerts.

● CCTV Monitoring

CCTV systems can be set up to send alerts when motion is detected, when a virtual tripwire is triggered or if there is a loss of feed (which could be a sign of tampering). You can either monitor this yourself, which when you start out you may do, as it's cost-effective, but more likely is that you will outsource the monitoring of your site to an ARC (Alarm Receiving Centre) monitoring station and save yourself from being woken in the middle of the night.

In these resilient and professional centres, banks of trained operators are watchful and react to any unusual activity swiftly and effectively.

03. What is the purpose of a cctv system in a self-storage facility?

They will observe, check and challenge intruders and then act on the situation. This could be to call the keyholder, or a manned guarding company, or the police, or simply to stand down if it was an authorised person on site.

ARCs normally charge by the camera per month, you don't have to monitor every single camera on your site; the entrance, perimeter and access to your main building could be enough.

04 Don't forget GDPR, the ICO and Signage

Any security system that captures and stores images of people or personal data by which they could be identified, falls under the GDPR (or UK GDPR). This means you should assess and document why you are collecting the data, how you will use it, how long you will keep it and how you'll store and protect it and who will have access to it. The NVR (Network Video Recorder) should be kept in a locked office or box and only designated individuals should have access, via a complex password.

This information is recorded in a DPIA (Data protection impact assessment), your security installer should be able to assist you with this.

If you're recording images then you must register with the ICO and you must have compliant signage erected. This should detail that CCTV recording is taking place, why, and who is controlling the scheme. These signs should be easily visible; not only are they a great deterrent to criminals, but they protect you from non-compliance and mean should there be an incident, the footage you have can be used in onward investigation and prosecution. We recommend minimum A2 size at the entrance to site and on perimeter fences and A3 at the entrance to any buildings.

05 Make life easy for you and your team

● Service and Maintenance

Security systems are only effective when they are fully operational. Identify any issues quickly and get them rectified, a camera could go down because it's been tampered with and that could be a precursor for a burglary with or without internal collusion. Don't leave your site vulnerable. Good security installers will offer a maintenance contract, but there are self-help steps you can take such as keeping cameras free of cobwebs and ensuring foliage doesn't grow and obscure the field of vision. Make sure when staff leave that you change passwords or codes for alarms and the NVR.

● Integration

Do your security systems communicate with your management software*? Can you see all your security measures and events in one place?
Save time and improve security by integrating your processes and creating alerts for specific events or automatically suspending/ releasing a renter's access when their account is overdue or brought up to date.
* requires API connection between your management software and your security systems.

● Market your security measures

Lastly, shout about your great security systems. A key driver for choosing a storage provider may be cost, but customers are never going to choose a site where they aren't convinced their possessions will be safe, secure and protected.