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Tamper Evident Plastic Deposit Bags

During my 26 years career in the cash-in-transit industry, I was responsible for overseeing and reviewing numerous theft reports. Investigations in the cash-in-transit industry can be complex due to the numerous people and organizations that touch the funds which are transported, stored, or processed.

When tamper evident plastic deposit bags replaced the cloth bag and lead seal nearly two decades ago, I was optimistic that the introduction of these bags would help catch thieves and reduce losses. I was disappointed to discover that many of these bags could be compromised without leaving obvious indication of tampering. We also learned that many of these bags would burst open during routine handling.

Poorly designed bags serve only to make an already complex investigation even longer and more complex. I recently tested several bags (April 2010) from different companies only to find that these security bags could still be accessed and resealed without reflecting a compromise to the bag.

The cardinal rule in the cash-in-transit system is to always “get and give a receipt” for each transaction. Many tellers signing for these bags rely on a quick visual observation of a bag to determine if the bag has been compromised. However, they may fail to spot that tiny slice at the bottom of the bag that was resealed after money had been removed or another part of the bag which had been opened and resealed using a freezing or heat process. After a quick check of the bag, if no compromise is noted, the teller signs for and accepts custody and control of the deposit bag and its contents. A visual check of these bags can be effective provided the bag is of good quality.

When a tamper evident bag is compromised, a marking such as VOID should appear on various parts of the bag; the type of marking varies. If these markings do not appear, the bag is considered uncompromised when in fact a poorly designed bag may not reveal that the bag was indeed compromised. The absence of industry standards adds to the confusion.

Another problem is that some bags are so poorly designed that these tamper indicator markings easily appear on the bag during normal handling even though no attempt was made to access the bag. These markings are referred to as false positives and occur by simply handling and transporting the bag. The problem created in this scenario results from a steady stream of false positives and the need for tellers to work quickly. Tellers often become complacent in reporting these false positive markings for a more thorough review prior to opening, since no funds are missing in the vast majority of case. This is simply due to the majority of cash handlers being honest, hard working people but there are those not so honest who seek to capitalize on these vulnerabilities.

During an incident involving missing funds from a properly designed bag, an investigation is shortened when the compromised bag is discovered and reported to management. This action eliminates other organizations which would have handled the bag had the compromise not been discovered. A properly designed bag will often lead to an immediate resolution upon discovery.

It was evident during my recent examination of sample bags that some vendors may have lowered the quality of their bags, perhaps in reaction to the recent economic down-turn.

Proper utilization of an evident tamper resistant bag involves: 1) Recording the numbers listed on the bag onto a receipt provided during the handling process. 2) Maintaining this paperwork in a secure place. 3) Verifying these numbers and the integrity of the bag during each transaction. 4) Collecting and maintaining used bags for a period of time as prescribed by contract or policy. 5) Controlling and accounting of unused bags. 7) Immediately reporting a bag suspected of compromise. 8) Monitoring the process to ensure that the quality of the bag does not deteriorate. 9) Ensuring that bags are not overloaded to the extent that they cannot be sealed properly.

If a teller at the bank observes that the seal number on the bag does not match the seal number on the paperwork, the carrier's management is notified and the teller refuses to accept the bag. CCTV playback and other investigative tools are also used to aid in verifying the internal audit trail to determine at what point the bag was compromised.

Prior to purchasing evident tamper bags, I would suggest obtaining sufficient bag samples to test with heating and freezing applications. Also test to ensure that normal handing does not result in a false positive reading or inadvertent opening. Remember, cash-in-transit carriers do not have the luxury of handling these bags with kid gloves so make sure that the thickness of the plastic is sufficient to hold the loads expected.

Disclaimer: *This article is written for general information purposes only and is not intended to be, and should not be used as, a primary source for making security decisions.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jim McGuffey, CPP has 38 years of security and safety management experience with responsibility for the protection of approximately 70 high risk facilities in various parts of the U.S during his career. He is now a security consultant and has been retained as an expert witness by defense and plaintiff firms for premise security incidents and issues involving the cash-in-transit industry. Jim also conducts security risk assessments for organizations. Please review his white paper titled Security Risk Assessment at www.acesecurityconsultants.com

Jim earned numerous national awards for consistently improving safety, security and profit while working for global organizations in the security/transportation industry where he held the positions Area General Manager, District Manager and Regional Vice President with full P&L responsibility for multiple profit centers.

Jim earned a B.A. in Criminal Justice from Aurora University and an M.A. in Management from Webster University. Prior to joining the armored car industry, Jim served 3 years in the military and 8 years in law enforcement. He currently teaches Criminal Justice Courses on Crimes in US Business at a college near his home.

Jim has been an active member of A.S.I.S. since 1981 and is also a member of International Association of Professional Security Consultants (IAPSC). Jim earned the Certified Protection Professional certification which is recognized throughout the world. The Certified Protection Professional (CPP®) designation is acknowledged as the security profession's highest recognition of practitioners and is evidence that an individual is "Board Certified in Security Management." The CPP® is awarded based upon experience, education, and of an examination that provides an objective measure of an individual's broad-based knowledge and competency in security management. Ongoing professional development is required in order to maintain the credential. The CPP® is administered by ASIS International, the preeminent international organization for security professionals, with more than 35,000 members worldwide.

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