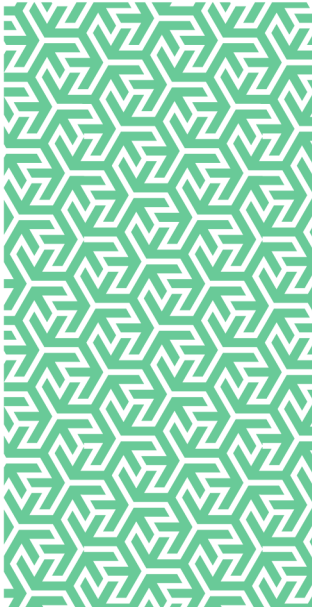


rmp

Risk control

Key Control:

How good is your key security?



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Key Security: How good is your key security?

Introduction

In a domestic situation losing a key can be frustrating. You can get a locksmith to replace your lock and provide replacement keys and, although costly in time and effort it does not involve significant expense. In commercial settings the impact can be far greater¹. One institution in America had to spend in excess of £460,000 replacing locks and installing a more effective system to secure keys to avoid this situation in the future.

In the event of keys being lost, not only will you have to replace the keys, the locks will need rekeying or replacing and there is an increased security risk in the time between key loss and the reinstatement of locks. The threat of vandalism or theft is real as everything that the key grants access to is at risk.

Master Key

The term "Master key" is used for the highest level above a number of master² group keys. A master group locking system with its master group key is used in situations where a few key personnel require access to the rooms and facilities in a specific building. The system is based on the principle that each door can be locked with its own key and none of these keys can lock another door. Only the master group key can lock all doors in the building.

The most important element of a locking system is the cylinder in the lock attached to the door. It can be difficult to understand but it is not how the key is cut that works the lock, it's how the cylinder is pinned that "allows" the key to work.

The main benefits of a master key system are increased security related to restricting access to sensitive areas and convenience. A well-designed master key system reduces the number of keys required when one key opens many doors.

Key Control

The key elements of a key control system³ are:

- Conduct a complete inventory of locked assets and keys in your buildings. Keep a record all of these items in a master key inventory. They can later be brought under central control
- Determine who needs access and verify the level of access that is needed
- Decide how keys will be distributed and controlled. Using an automated key locker means you do not necessarily need to have them available at a staffed location.

- For low security and low management environments a simple lockbox and paper sign-out form may be appropriate. Modern workplaces are now using an electronic key management system.
- Prepare and publish a key management policy that defines responsibilities. There needs to be a clear procedure outlining what every individual must do when signing out or returning a key. Be clear what needs to happen when someone reports lost keys. Also ensure you have arrangements for handling exceptions, like one-time access, or access for temporary employees, like contractors.

Key Loss

There are many situations where you may let a third party's such as a contractor have access⁴ to a master key. The contractor may need to gain entry to restricted areas that you do not wish members of the public to access to protect their health and safety.

In this situation retention of the key by the controller of the premises would minimise the risk of loss, and replacement may not be covered by insurance.

Consequences

In many cases the level of self-insured retention on your policy will mean the significant costs of key replacement, replacing cores, not to mention the time spent investigating the loss will be borne by your organisation.

Time to Review

Any prudent and responsible organisation will regularly review your key control system to make sure such a loss does not occur.

References

1. [Master key loss costs College more than \\$500,000](#) The Flat Hat News
2. [The master key - a security risk?](#)
3. [The High Costs of Lost Keys for Businesses and How to Avoid Them](#) Real Time Networks
4. [Master Key Systems Explained](#)

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

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