

South Yorkshire security firm urges rail sites to combat crime with manned guarding

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After British Transport Police (BTP) revealed that a single **cable thief had caused £18,000 of damage across sites in Rotherham** earlier this year, one local security and surveillance services firm is urging the industry not to rely solely on CCTV.

BTP connected the Rotherham man to a string of incidents – including the theft of 20 metres of 48-core cable. He was given a suspended sentence last month after admitting to theft, obstructing the railway, and possession of a class B drug. Now, Mark Harrop, Managing Director of Sheffield-based security firm **STAT1**, is keen to educate companies on the benefits of manned guarding.

“Vandalism and theft cost the rail industry thousands – particularly in South Yorkshire, where Network Rail has been working to address the problem,” said Mark, who began his career in the armed forces. “Between April 2021 and 2022, metal cable thieves in the region cost taxpayers **over £280,000**, and delayed journeys by 89 hours.

“When it comes to protecting sites, cameras do fill a need in some situations. While they need human intervention, they can help to determine what happened, and provide brilliant evidence in court. We know and agree that cameras are a cost-effective solution. However, the monitoring companies overseeing

footage have multiple sites to watch; activations can go unchecked or be incorrectly dismissed as a false activation or due to climatic reasons: weather etc.

“And, if a hostile presence is detected and a response unit called, they must travel at the speed limit – only the emergency services are authorised to exceed it. Travelling distances to a site intrusion raises risks, as the security officers want to try and deliver an intervention, but sometimes these individuals are so well-rehearsed and experienced that they can be on and off an unoccupied site in five minutes or less. And clearly, the presence of cameras alone doesn’t deter criminals.”

Mark (whose fully trained SIA Licensed personnel provide a range of personalised security and surveillance services) is encouraging rail organisations to consider a different solution, manned guarding.

“Done right, manned guarding can act as a deterrent,” he explained. “When criminals approach a rail site and see a security officer, they will immediately recognise that it’s more difficult to target and warn others from their criminal fraternity.

“Good security officers will be unpredictable, alter their routes, and dwell in certain areas of interest, as well as obtaining and passing on descriptions, and ensuring that they are documented. They’ll have their finger on the pulse and be sensitive to the slightest changes in their environments. It all adds up to a faster, more thorough, and more responsive security service.”

Mark added that in particularly challenging rail environments, several layers of security might be required. He also warned against the using non-licensed personnel, which could render insurance policies null and void. He said: “If the risks to a site are heightened and or everything else has failed, we encourage the use of multiple security layers – especially K9 services. Ideally, all levels and layers of security are interlocking and overlapping, as this gives the best outcomes. It’s crucial for rail – an industry in which theft and vandalism can have safety implications, as well as causing significant delays and costing the taxpayer money.”

Now, as Network Rail and BTP continue to crack down on cable theft in the region, he is inviting businesses to contact STAT1 for a consultation and ‘penetration testing’: an arranged yet unannounced test of their current security arrangements.

Mark added: “They then get a score out of a hundred by the 10 assessment areas, each carrying 10 percent of the assessment. A formal and written explanation accompanies every ‘pen test.’ It is not personal feedback, it is professional, it’s looking at your sites and assets through a fresh pair of eyes. It does require people involved to have a growth mindset and to embrace the points mentioned.

“We’re encouraging organisations to review the effectiveness of their current arrangements. Yes, manned guarding does cost more, but you are buying an exclusive service. And when the costs of rail vandalism and theft are so high, it really does pay to take a different approach and nip things in the bud.” To learn more about STAT1, visit <https://stat1.co.uk/>.