

30 Years and Still Going Strong

Senstar's buried intrusion detection system has been protecting Phoenix House for Youth since 1989

Remember what was happening in 1989?

George H.W. Bush was president of the United States, New Kids on the Block and Madonna topped the music charts, a BMW cost a mere \$21,000, and Senstar's buried intrusion detection technology was installed at Phoenix House for Youth Inc. in Ottawa, Ont. Canada.

A lot has changed in 30 years, but one thing from that list has remained constant – the Senstar system is still monitoring the comings and goings at Phoenix House. When first built 30 years ago, some citizens living near the facility in rural Ottawa were concerned with having a detention center in their neighborhood. To alleviate their fears, the facility incorporates many layers of security, all of which meet strict Ministry standards. These layers, including the perimeter intrusion detection system, underwent a significant review process before being implemented, and continue to undergo regular testing and evaluation.

“(The perimeter intrusion detection system) is a perfect product for a facility of this type in a neighborhood like this,” said Executive Director James McDonald, who has been with Phoenix House since its inception. “Our boys are probably better supervised than the kids in the neighbors' houses.”

Phoenix House consists of a main building – the house – that sits on 25 acres of open fields and forest. Surrounding the house, in a loop covering approximately 2/3 of an acre, is the perimeter intrusion detection system consisting of a pair of buried sensor cables that generate an electromagnetic field and trigger an alarm whenever someone enters or exits the perimeter.

Today's perimeter intrusion detection systems often report to a security management system that displays the disturbance location and calls up the relevant surveillance cameras. However, this technology was not available 30 years ago and so the system at Phoenix House simply triggers an alarm in the staff room whenever someone crosses over the sensor cables, coming or going, 24/7.

This works well for Phoenix House as staff and visitor traffic (including educators, social workers, lawyers, police, and friends and family) is tightly controlled, and almost all arrivals and departures are scheduled. If an unscheduled alarm is triggered, it is investigated.



Tracking visitors isn't the only goal of the system at Phoenix House. It also tracks any residents trying to leave, although according to Mr. McDonald, there are very few such incidents.

“Being an open detention facility, the boys don't want to risk stricter sentences,” said McDonald. “Plus, (because of the rural location) there's not much place for folks to go.”

Overall, the system has worked very well during the last 30 years, and with little maintenance required, has essentially paid for itself many times over.

“The system effectively meets our needs,” said Mr. McDonald. “It has stood the test of time which speaks volumes to the quality of Senstar products. We are very happy.”

Customer Profile

Phoenix House for Youth Inc. is a non-profit organization fully funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. It provides a residential program for males 12 to 17 years of age serving Open Custody and Detention sentences assigned by youth courts.