



How Hampton High School Library Uses Electromagnetic (EM) Security to Help Protect Its Collection

When homework deadlines loom, students can be tempted to remove expensive reference books from their high school library. Hampton High relies on a 3M electromagnetic security system to make sure that all students have equal access to research materials.

The Challenge

“This is a good school and we have very good kids,” said Hampton High School librarian Mary Beth Orbin. Located in the Pittsburgh suburb of Allison Park, Pa., Hampton has received local and national recognition as a top school. Its 1,100 students consistently score above national averages on standardized tests, and about 95 percent of them continue on to higher education.

“Because this is a very academic school,” Orbin added, “the kids are under a lot of pressure. They all do research papers and their teachers expect them to use printed reference materials in addition to online sources.” As deadlines for these and other projects approach, students can be tempted to remove a book without checking it out, so they could work on their papers after the library has closed—a practice that would be understandable, but unacceptable.

“Unauthorized removal of a reference book wouldn’t be fair to the hundreds of other students who might need access to it,” Orbin noted. And then there is the cost to the library: “These books can be very expensive. A single volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography can run over \$250. If you lost even a few of those you’d have a problem coming up with the funds to replace them.”

Losses from the unauthorized removal of books and other items can be substantial. The American Library Association cites studies showing a loss of up to .5 percent per year. For the 20,300-item collection in the Hampton High School

library, even a .5 percent loss rate could mean up to 100 books. At an average of \$30 per book, this translated to a potential replacement cost of \$3,000 per year.

The Solution

To help ensure that library materials are available for all students and to guard against losses, Hampton High School has relied for many years on an electromagnetic (EM) security system from 3M. “The system was already installed when I came here, and I’ve been at the school for 17 years,” Orbin said. She estimated that the system has been protecting the school’s collection for at least 20 years.

The high school uses covert 3M™ Tattle-Tape™ Security Strips in all books and magazines and a 3M™ Detection System at each of the library’s two exits. During a renovation in 2000, the original detection systems were upgraded to the 3M Model 3500 Series, with attention-getting audible and visible alarms. She pointed out that the alarms will stop virtually anyone who is attempting an unauthorized removal and, at the same time, remind the other students that the system is in place and functioning.

Orbin said the school doesn’t rely exclusively on the 3M Detection Systems. “We try to keep someone near the exits, especially when large classes are leaving the library.” But with a steady flow of students—usually between 500 and 1,000 daily—the staff is often occupied at the circulation desk or elsewhere in the library. “We can’t always have someone standing at the exits, so we have to count on the security system.”



Create a More Human Library

The Result

Orbin said the system has played a big role in keeping books in the library's collection, where they can be used by students year after year.

"We recently finished a complete inventory for the 2008-2009 school year," she said, "and we determined that only nine books were missing." She added that this very low loss rate is consistent with the rates found during previous inventories conducted at the school. "These statistics are outstanding and I credit our security system for a large part of our success."

The 3M Tattle-Tape Security Strips and Detection Systems also allow Orbin and her staff to be as productive as possible. Instead of standing guard at the exits, they can provide more high value tasks, such as helping students find and use reference materials. "We have a small staff. The security system lets us operate efficiently."

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