UNIQUE TRUSTED COMMUNITY HELPS PROTECT NY

Abstract:

Protecting the security of sensitive facilities, critical infrastructures, and key resources remains an ever-increasing challenge to our regional security. To help detect and mitigate these risks, facility owners, contractors, and labor organizations must work together to quickly and accurately verify that anyone who seeks access to sensitive areas and information, are knownand have a demonstrated a threat-free history.

The need to implement best practices for protecting individuals' privacy rights while managing acontractor screening process, verifying workers' identity, and vetting policy compliance, and tracking of site access is essential. In support of these requirements, SWAC's innovative public-private partnership has developed a unique trusted contractor community that serves owners and operators of critical transportation infrastructure, financial institutions, and other public and private worksites throughout the New York and New Jersey region.

The Challenge:

Safe and secure development and operation of critical infrastructure is key to the economic growth and vitality of America. From transportation infrastructure development and rejuvenation to financial centers like the World Trade Center complex, premier public and private facility owners are continually supporting large capital construction projects that meet the needs of our ever-growing population and economy. These large construction projects create constantly changing levels of demand for workers representing diverse trades. As a result, thousands of transient workers migrate from site to site regularly.

Simply flashing an ID card to gain access to sensitive facilities and worksites creates a vulnerability that is easily compromised with potentially catastrophic human, economic and reputational consequences. Assuring the integrity of individuals who require access to confidential information or secure worksites is a challenging and costly endeavor. The lack of a common standard for vetting workers' background, high cost of criminal background screening, severely limited access to counter-terrorism watch lists, required personal privacy protections, and the disconnected nature of sensitive facilities and respective owner/operators all contribute to the significant operational challenges that regional risk managers must address.

As a result, large government agencies, like the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and high-profile American institutions sought to work together, organizing a cooperative effort to establish and implement best practices for personnel assurance that could be universally adopted in an efficient and effective manner. This innovative initiative would require a system that could authenticate workers' identity and credentials, confirma threat-free history, and verify that each worker met safety and security compliance requirements for access to a wide variety of workplaces.

The Solution:

The Secure Worker Access Consortium, known as SWAC, was formed to enable public agencies and private enterprises to strategically partner with regional labor organizations, contractors, consultants, and vendors to establisha trusted community of companies and their employees who stand ready to safely support the capital construction and operational needs of secure facilities throughout the region.

SWAC provided its community with a secure, web-based portal for member companies to enroll in the program and securely submit enrollment applications for each of their employees. Coordinating and managing this highly-sensitive process in a consistent fashion for thousands of member companies and hundreds of thousands of individual applicants delivered a consistent, non-discriminatory, secure, and private method for identifying and assuring the integrity of diverse workforces.

Following guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, SWAC implemented a universal standard for positive identity verification and criminal background screening based on 49 CFR 1542.209 and 49 CFR 1572.103. Through partnership with Transportation Security Administration's Terrorist Vetting Service, SWAC delivered to its community robust terrorist watch list screening typically reserved for Federal agencies. Adoption of these standards and processes allowed SWAC members to be vetted once in order to meet the identity, criminal history, and counter-terrorism screening requirements of all participating facility owners.

To facilitate privacy protection and real-time verification of members' active compliance, SWAC issues a membership ID card to each member that successfully completes the program's vetting requirements. Local facility risk managers can easily scan these cards using a PC or smartphone application, helping assure the safety and security of their sensitive facilities and construction sites. Using SWAC's check-in/out function, security managers always know who is on-site at any time, and when workers arrived and departed a given secure area.

The SWAC program has united the efforts of broad-ranging risk management stakeholders in the most efficient and effective ways. The program has eliminated vast duplication of effort and cost throughout the NY/NJ region, while assuring that best practices in worker vetting and protection of individual privacy rights are always maintained. This unique cooperative partnership protects workers, mitigates risk, reduces costs, and improves regional security. **ES**