

Newark Housing Authority Government and Public Safety



The Newark Housing Authority is comprised of 45 housing developments—10 devoted to the elderly and disabled and 35 developments for families. NHA buildings are located in nearly every neighborhood in the city of Newark, they number over 8,700 separate units, and provide housing for over 20,000 residents.

In 2006, the Newark Housing Authority was in crisis, laboring under the threat of a Federal takeover. The NHA hired a new Executive Director, Keith Kinard, and he shook up the organization from top to bottom—the executive team was completely revamped, budget cuts required that numerous staff be let go, and the in-house NHA security guard unit was replaced with a private security service.

The Challenge

Along with the major staff and organization changes noted above, the NHA embarked on a major initiative to upgrade physical security systems to provide more effective assistance to Housing Authority security staff in their job of creating safer communities for NHA residents. At the time Kinard and his new team took over, many NHA developments were rife with drugs and gangs, mothers and children were prevented from moving freely throughout their neighborhoods, and seniors certainly needed more protection.

The new management team concluded quickly that a physical security upgrade would play a large role in combating crime and increasing resident safety. NHA's initial security strategy was to lock down all the buildings housing elderly residents with improved access control and a 24/7 guard presence.

Prior to installing state-of-the-art surveillance technology from DVTel, Newark Housing maintained low-tech, black and white cameras that were unmonitored. If an incident happened, "We might get lucky," said Tory Gunsolley, Chief Administrative Officer for the Newark Housing Authority, and the video would aid in any incident investigation. But given the level of crime and general low quality of life throughout the housing developments, the security staff wasn't getting lucky very often.

The Solution

In the initial stages of the security upgrade initiative, NHA installed a fiber optic backbone connecting all its buildings, providing a strong infrastructure for a high-performance IP camera solution connected directly to the network. A dedicated command center was established to be staffed by at least two operators at all times.

A DVTel intelligent Security Operations Center (iSOC) was chosen to manage all the video feeds covering upwards to 50 of the Authority's buildings. The iSOC's functionality includes a mapping program which displays icons of the various security devices and their locations. Flashing red icons signify alarms and potential trouble. Security staff trained and supplied by Winfield Security monitor more than 600 cameras located throughout the Housing Authority's many properties. The cameras are a mix of fixed and PTZ.

Millennium Communications Group advised on interior and exterior placement for the hundreds of cameras to be installed. Each building's lobby guard monitors that building's cameras, along with the central command center, and each building's manager(s) have access to the video as well. After improving security and amenities for the most vulnerable, NHA management focused their sights on family developments and controlling access to NHA properties. In addition to the new video surveillance system, NHA upgraded access control throughout many of its buildings and the DVTel iSOC is integrated with an Emerge access control solution from IEI.

Newark Housing Authority

Case Study

The Highlights

- The DVTel iSOC manages video feeds from over 600 cameras, 24/7 and 365 days a year providing crisp, clear images for two or more staff in charge of the Command Center and responsible for the safety of NHA's 20,000+ residents.
- In addition to video feeds, the command center and the DVTel iSOC receive fire alarm and integrated access data, can "speak" to persons of interest through one-way intercoms, has a direct line to a Newark Police dispatcher and to each building security officer, and even takes Tip Line information called in by residents.
- Upon entering the command center, one's attention goes immediately to the multiple video wall screens that dominate the room. Directly in front of the video walls, the two operators work from several individual workstations displaying single camera views, multiple tiles of views, maps of locations, and access control information.
- To date, results in fighting crime have been impressive. Charles Whitner, NHA Director of Security recounted a number of stories how he and his staff, in cooperation with Newark Police, "staked out" problem areas within the NHA developments and gathered video evidence to connect suspects with their drug stashes and documented them in the act of selling their drugs.
- "Our DVTel system has resulted in numerous arrests and convictions," said NHA Executive Director, Keith Kinard. "The judges have been very interested when we bring our laptops to court and show them footage of what has happened. Some of them are caught off-guard at just how clear the images are." Prosecutions coming out of the NHA have included aggravated assault, petty thefts, vandalism, and numerous drug crimes.
- Newark Housing Authority is experiencing excellent results after deploying the DVTel iSOC to manage surveillance video from its wide array of IP cameras. Kinard again, "What we're hearing from our residents is that those who have cameras on the first floor of their building want them on higher floors. Those family developments that don't have cameras want cameras."
- Monitoring over 600 cameras is a lot of information to focus on. Operator experience, in tandem with DVTel technology, has proven key to improving residents' safety. Command center staff report that after weeks of observing the communities under surveillance, they recognize patterns—when things look right and when something is amiss. Gaining such in-depth knowledge of the rhythms of the residents under their care ensures staff can focus their camera's attention where it is most effective.
- Another important aspect to the NHA's improved security is that Newark Police take a more active role in policing the properties. As Whitner recounted, "The NPD response is excellent, and with our camera views we're able to provide helpful guidance, such as telling them exactly who they're looking for and where he is. The police know that we often have video footage of an incident and that video is going aid in more successful prosecutions.
- "The video system has exceeded our expectations," said Kinard. "We use it not only for crime prevention and prosecution, but for management purposes as well." For example, a camera is installed above every security guard desk, which allows the guarding company to monitor if officers are where they are supposed to be—in effect doing roll call of 30 security guards by camera in a matter of minutes, remotely.
- A large measure of NHA's success is attributed to the iSOC's scalability, flexibility, and overall ease-of-use. Kinard commented on how the DVTel system has changed residents' lives, "One of the greatest things has been the visual changes we see at the family properties. A few years ago, we'd see 30 guys hanging around the basketball court selling drugs and acting in a menacing way. Now, kids are playing basketball and mothers are out there with children in strollers—from a quality of life perspective, it's a huge improvement."

