

A Danish municipality ensures security for its citizens and public institutions.



"It's important that employees can feel safe when they come to work."

- Jørgen Nielsen, Manager of Risk Control

The Copenhagen suburb of Brøndby has 35,000 citizens and 3,500 employees who work in about 100 institutions. It is considered to be just a medium-sized governmental district in comparison to other municipalities in Denmark, but in 2002 they made a very big decision that will affect its growing population in a positive way: all the public institutions must have video surveillance installed within the next few years.

It was quickly determined that the surveillance should be digital. With this new technology, they can easily and flexibly add more cameras when needed, as well as integrate with other security systems later on. Brøndby chose Milestone Xprotect software, sold and installed by AC Sikring A/S.

Strategic decision for social welfare

The strategic objective behind this comprehensive project was defined by Brøndby's mayor and politicians a year ago: they plan to ensure the safety of all the district schools, childcare facilities, libraries against vandalism and other criminal incidents.

"We will not have our population feel unsafe, nor will we allow their public buildings to be vulnerable to vandalism and other crimes. We are taking preventive action against criminals to ensure security in Brøndby. That is the motivation behind the initiatives in this project," states Jørgen Nielsen, who is responsible for the surveillance project in the municipality of Brøndby.

A budget of 6 million Danish crowns has been set for this big project, to cover a four-year period for all of the installations. The first portion of the money has already been utilized: in the summer of 2003, AC Sikring began implementation in 9 sites, including two big schools, some childcare centers, after-school youth facilities, and the district's huge storage location where they keep machines and materials for the maintenance of all roads, parks, etc.



Focus on problems with vandalism

"Several years ago, we had an incident with someone sneaking in to our storage location. They went wild driving around on our machines! Even though they couldn't get out of the gates, they still managed to destroy a lot of things on the property," recalls Nielsen.

He further explains that such wanton destruction and vandalism creates the biggest costs for the municipality: last year they used a million crowns alone just on renovations of broken glass. This clearly illustrates that so-called 'small crimes' are not really small at all when seen from the larger perspective. Vandalism is a big problem, but one that can be handled – and that's exactly what they are doing in Brøndby.

"A year ago, we had another kind of problem," adds Susanne Ploug Larsen, who is the Risk Control Coordinator for Brøndby. "There were some very macabre activities where criminals were slaughtering the pets in an after-school youth center, leaving the body parts lying in the playground. They also spray-painted some horses. Understandably, it was a horrible experience for the employees to arrive at work the next day and discover the dismembered animals - not to mention the children's reactions."

This institution was naturally one of the first chosen to receive the new security solution.

The old security approach

"Four years ago, all the windows of a school were smashed to pieces one Friday night. The next day we started setting up an analog solution using videotapes and that was the beginning of our career in security," remembers Jørgen Nielsen. "We had to react fast, and the system was put together with products from five different suppliers and electricians with lots of cameras and tapes. It was expensive but at least there were no more broken windows there."

Shortly thereafter, they installed similar solutions in about 12 other institutions.

The new surveillance

"At the end of 2002, we asked for public offers based on plans for the new video surveillance project, which is expected to take place over the next four years. We contacted a security consultant, who confirmed our own research showing that the new solution should be future oriented. We got bids from seven different solutions, but chose Milestone as the most advanced and 100% digital. We believe this is the future; we do not believe in videotapes anymore. Now everything can be stored on a hard disk," states Nielsen.

Brøndby already knew about AC Sikring as security specialists in the market, and chose them for their solid offer that was a combination of good service and high quality products.

"It was precisely the solution we were looking for, with Milestone that is future-safe and more flexible for our overall needs," claims Nielsen. "We want to have better options for upgrading with ongoing technological developments."

Only external surveillance

The buildings are monitored at night, on weekends and during holidays, when there are no personnel present. Brøndby has installed 70 cameras with infrared (IR) light, which means that they can record images at night, without the need for strong general lighting in the area that could bother neighbors. Another advantage is that the infrared light cannot be seen by anyone attempting criminal activities.





Bent Schwartzbach, who is a manager at AC Sikring, says: "Outdoor surveillance is installed to capture images of any vandalism or break-ins, and to allow Brøndby to be connected to our Video Alarm Central service called Security Point. This gives us the ability to react before a crime happens. Through the network connection, our staff receive alarms when there is any motion detection, and they can quickly determine from any camera's recorded images if it's a matter for concern requiring action – for example, sending out guards to the location."

"It's a big relief for any institution personnel leaving for the weekend or a holiday, to know that their place is monitored for protection," affirms Jørgen Nielsen.

Open communication

"Some parents have been skeptical about the surveillance because they were afraid that their children might be monitored," remarks Susanne Ploug Larsen. "Therefore, we have chosen to be totally open about communicating exactly what it is being used for – to ensure safety and reduce vandalism. The response from parents since then has been one of understanding."

Brøndby municipality's labor union and personnel organization have also accepted the idea that surveillance is being set up over the next several years. All the same, Brøndby continues to make a big effort to ensure that everyone involved understands the goals of making public areas safer.

"It is only outdoor monitoring – nothing indoor where people are working," concludes Susanne Ploug Larsen. "So there's no reason for those kinds of worries."

Employees at the institutions can feel much more safe and secure when they come to work: they know what our surveillance system is for," confirms Jørgen Nielsen.

Fast installations

Childcare centers and playgrounds may need only four cameras, where larger schools can use 16 to 30 cameras. As of now, about 70 cameras have been set up over the summer in nine institutions that belong to the first phase of the project.

Susanne Ploug Larsen has been involved in instruction sessions for the new system at the locations and reports: "It has gone really well. The training did not take very long, and the employees figured out quickly how the program works. Milestone is user-friendly and easy to navigate around in the images – in fact, they enjoyed it so much it was hard to tear them away from it!"

Managed at each location

The surveillance is set up for each institution to have someone in charge of managing the system.

"At the schools, it is basically the Building Maintenance Manager or Vice Principal who checks the recordings and uses the system actively. They look at it in the mornings to see if there have been any irregularities during the night that they should do something about," Jørgen Nielsen explains. "It is pretty easy since the system is only set to record when motion is detected somewhere."





Each location can decide for themselves when the system will record surveillance images, according to their respective opening hours, and in coordination with the Security Point Alarm Central.

"Some schools have classes in the evenings, so they obviously would set their systems to start recording after 9 at night, whereas a childcare center closes at 5 p.m.," adds Susanne Ploug Larsen.

Automatic image storing

Brøndby has disk storage capacity for a good number of recordings, but there is no reason to save the files if nothing meaningful has taken place.

"It is naturally of no interest whatsoever if Mr. Pedersen in the neighborhood has walked by with his dog at 11 o'clock," grins Jørgen Nielsen.

Milestone software has intelligent functionality that allows them to only archive recordings where motion has been detected in the images.

"When the disk gets full of images, the system automatically overwrites the oldest files first to keep recording newer ones," explains Susanne Ploug Larsen. "We have not set the software to archive anything during the day either, so we have enough disk capacity for a whole week's worth of images."

Future expansion

Brøndby plans to implement the solution in 80-90 institutions that are slated to have the digital surveillance installed with the same user interface, by the time the project's budget is finally used up. About 300 cameras will be in operation with Milestone software by then.

Integration with their burglar alarm system is also desired in the future. This is a good option with Milestone software, since it is built using an open design that allows the flexibility to integrate with other security devices and applications.

Brøndby on the forefront

The spotlight is now on Brøndby as an example for other municipalities' security solutions. Jørgen Nielsen and Susanne Ploug Larsen have already received a number of referrals from other districts in the country who want to know more about their visionary way of handling public security problems and ensuring the safety of their citizens.

"Right now there's a lot of focus on us," concludes Jørgen Nielsen. "Others have heard about our project with digital video surveillance and would like to do something similar. Susanne and I have held presentations for people responsible for security, other risk control coordinators and technicians, to tell them about our project and experiences."

See more about Brøndby Kommune at www.brondby-kom.dk, AC Sikring A/S at www.ac-sikring.dk, and Milestone Systems at www.milestonesys.com

