West Virginia airport secures critical areas with biometric HandReaders

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Summary
West Virginia’s Yeager Airport uses biometric readers to guard entry to sensitive areas in the open-access passenger terminal.

Business Need
The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) soon will issue rules for how airports control access to control towers, perimeters, vehicle gates and other sensitive areas. The requirements will be based on pilot security technology projects currently underway at 20 U.S. airports. Yeager Airport in Charlottesville, West Virginia is getting a jump on the new Homeland Security regulations by conducting its own pilot program.

Challenges
Yeager Airport’s control tower is in the busy passenger terminal. Not all of the airport’s 80 employees need control-tower access, but a significant number do. The doors open an average of five times an hour around the clock. In the past, Yeager Airport’s own police force guarded the control tower doors 24 hours a day, at a daily cost of $1,200. The airport’s HVAC systems and other sensitive equipment are in the basement near the stairway that leads to the control tower. Two months after 9/11, the airport began testing a cost-effective system for controlling access to both critical areas.

Statistics
Industry: Transportation
Application: Access control
Biometric: HandKey®
HandReaders: 5
Geography: United States
Solution
Yeager Airport installed five Schlage biometric HandKeys® to secure the control tower area. An airport employee uses the keypad to enter a personal identification number (PIN) and then places a hand on the reader.

The HandReader simultaneously analyzes more than 31,000 points and instantaneously records more than 90 separate measurements of an individual’s hand -- including length, width, thickness and surface area -- to verify that the person using the device is really who he or she claims to be. The HandReader compares this information with a previously-stored template of the individual’s hand.

Once the person is identified as a valid user, the control tower door opens. The entire reading and verification process takes less than a second.

“It has been the consensus since 9/11 that using biometrics in access control validation is the way to go,” said Rick Atkinson, Airport Director. “It is our belief that the TSA will recommend some form of biometrics be used either instead of or in addition to other access control measures.”

Results
The HandKeys significantly lowered payroll costs by eliminating the need for around-the-clock guards at the control tower doors. “Since the readers were installed they have been remarkably easy to administer and simple to maintain,” Atkinson said.

Yeager Airport
Yeager Airport, named for flying ace Brigadier General Charles “Chuck” Yeager, began operations in 1947. The airport sits 937 feet above sea level in the hills near Charleston, West Virginia’s capital, a government, coal-mining and transportation hub. Today, the airport occupies 737 acres. Six commercial carriers serve the region’s residents and businesses.

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