Physical Security:
Placement (2)

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This is one of a series of short notes on physical security for network managers. Physical security looks at aspects of the environment in which we work and where we place network components.

Today we will continue our look at security aspects of the placement of critical elements of our networking and computational infrastructure.

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Place the network center or computer room far from hazardous areas. One story circulating in the security field tells of a security auditor in the U.K. who wondered about the vibrations he felt in his feet every now and then. "Oh that?" responded the data center manager, "That's just the lorries with the petrol." The computer room was directly over the passageway through which trucks carrying fuel oil regularly rumbled. Not a low-risk situation.

High-security vaults are required by law to have no external walls. That is, they are completely inside their building with corridors completely surrounding them. This design makes it much more difficult to punch holes into the data center without having anyone notice. And in case you doubt that a frontal assault on a computer center is likely, some automatic teller machines have been removed holus-bolus by thieves operating back-hoes and forklifts (it does make one wonder about why no one thought it odd to see a forklift trundling along with an ATM in the middle of the night).

When I was teaching in Africa in the 1970s, I recall thieves simply ramming their way into houses with trucks or cutting through the roof to enter secured buildings. And back in the Spring of 1995, one of the participants in an online "Computer Crime and Countermeasures" course told us about how a series of smash-and-grab attacks had been made on a local company known to have installed large numbers of new workstations. The criminals simply crashed through the wall and made off with the equipment in the minutes before the police could respond to building alarms. Maddeningly, the criminals apparently watched and waited until the victims had replaced all the equipment--and did it again! They were dissuaded from further repetitions by having a 24-hour guard mounted on the site.

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