

# Cannabis Security Locking Systems Are Often the First Line of Defense

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Many times “security experts” offer advice that often skips over the first and final line of defense of any facility, be it a grow house, dispensary or recreational facility: effective cannabis security door locks.

The rush to higher security will inevitably lead to cameras, alarms and access control systems. No one can deny their value.

What do they not prevent? Forced entry. Cannabis facilities are well-known identifiable targets because not only are the facility contents easily sellable on the black market, there is usually a great deal of cash within the facilities. Those two factors insure continued appeal to burglars and organized crime groups.

According to Security System News, “Suppliers and systems integrators must make sure that cannabis dispensaries have tight security measures in place, specifically at entry/exit points and areas where cash is handled.” Furthermore, the article states “While cannabis retail stores are not allowed in every state, the early installations have utilized security controls similar to that of high-end jewelry stores...mandates on the federal, state and local levels must be adhered to when installing door control technology in cannabis dispensaries.”

While the industry publication article recognizes the needs, what does the article not mention: high security locking systems.

East Bay Times reported on a break-in to a cannabis facility during the early morning hours.

“Investigators found that entry into the business had been forced” they wrote and “Three males... were arrested on suspicion of second-degree burglary.”

A Vista CA report details another early morning break-in where “The suspect(s) shattered the doors and forced entry into both locations” which were dispensaries. In Illinois, “The theft occurred in the early morning hours ... in which cannabis plants were taken after the suspect entered through an exterior door.”

During the nationwide looting spree, an industry publication reports “Several US Cannabis Companies ‘Targeted’ During Nationwide Protests as Business Owners Lose Millions to Looters.” One facility reported “What happened last night may well put us out of business,” he said, estimating that (they) sustained roughly \$2 million worth of inventory loss and damages.” Certain localities are being overrun “Roaming in caravans, burglars overwhelmed Oakland’s cannabis industry in 2020.”

As an industry-leading publication, MJBizDaily reported, “All three business executives ...– in California, Chicago and Boston – agreed their shops were not looted by angry protesters but were targeted by criminals who had planned the break-ins.” One owner commented: “This wasn’t your typical loot-and-smash type deal. It was break in, get the product and get out.” That would fit with a wider industry narrative that most of the burglaries were systematic and not the result of angry mobs run amok. “It was definitely a targeted attack,” said another. “Nothing else in the area directly near us were directly harmed ... so these people definitely knew what they were coming in for.”

An owner who sustained losses due to a break-in summed it up best to an industry consultant: “Unfortunately, you learn from experience... now is a really good time to do security audits,” ... Spend a little money looking at what’s in place and get ahead of it.”

The common factor in these and other stories is inadequate protection against forced entry. Burglars with time on their hands will overrun the low security “non-residential” locks required by many codes as their only reference to physical security. A multi-layered physical security approach is required to secure facilities, and security doors with multi-point locking has proven to be a critical component in thwarting would-be burglaries.

While there are multiple technologies to inform grow house, dispensary and recreational facility owners and managers about breaches, tried and true best practices, like the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) theory promoted by ASIS International and other security professionals is the building block with effective measures to protect facilities.

A castle with a moat is the relevant analogy for owners and facility directors. Doors have replaced drawbridges and multi-point locks have replaced logs slid across raised drawbridges to keep doors secured. Storming the castle is another apt metaphor and the old layered approach of drawbridge, moat and alligators has been replaced by security doors, multiple-point locking and electronic access control. In addition, protecting the perimeter is not sufficient. Interior doors and spaces must also be protected.

Relying upon employees to engage door locks is also not a fool-proof method. Automatic deadbolt locking is now seen as the most effective way to guarantee that the door is secured each and every time it is closed. Single-motion egress (exiting with just one action like pulling down a lever or pressing a panic bar) is also a code requirement for these doors.

Installing multiple individual locks or slide bolts and padlocks on doors to secure them should also be avoided. This type of a solution violates life-safety and fire codes. Security dollars are poorly spent if the products selected are not code-compliant.

A holistic approach to security is always recommended. It is often said that the best doors and locks can be breached. This is true, but the best doors and locks are effective in delaying a forced entry. That’s where the alarms and video surveillance play their part. If a would-be burglar is aware that a forced entry will take so much time that they will be observed and the police notified, they will calculate that into their chances of a success break-in and removing valuable cannabis product and cash. Cannabis

facility owners who have instituted these best practices have survived the looting sprees as well as planned break-ins.

Selecting the right security consultant, one who can properly advise using best practices, like CPTED, is critical for any owner or manager looking to upgrade or design a new facility. If your consultant only brings up the trinity of “security system, surveillance and access control”, but doesn’t address doors and multi-point locks to prevent forced entries, find a new consultant.