

## **Close Watches**

There are three basic observation techniques used by surveillance. We've discussed IOU patrols, surveillance audits, and the last one normally used is the surveillance close watch. This observation is usually performed because of a specific observation made or specific information received concerning suspicious or actual criminal activity perpetrated by specific individual(s) and/or occurring in a specific area. The close watch observation is used in these cases to specifically (in other words, closely) monitor the reported individuals' every move while on the property or any and all activity in the subject area.

A number of close watches are implemented at the request of a general manager, gaming enforcement agents, law enforcement, department heads, employees, or the director of surveillance. Such requests are almost always based on a tip from an employee or informant or generated by unexplained losses or consistently lower than expected win percentages.

Whatever the reason for the close watch, it has been my experience that such information received is usually pretty good. Almost all of it has some basis in fact and should always be developed as much as possible. Information received from employees is especially good. Remember, employees working with an individual or a group of individuals usually have at least an idea or suspicion of what's going on.

Employees don't like to tell on other employees, but sometimes they do, and the information is usually right on the mark. The key point about close watches is that when such information is received, make sure you follow it up. There is an excellent chance the information is solid and when investigated will result in an effective arrest.

This is usually where surveillance rooms go wrong: they either discount the source of information or disregard it entirely; or because they don't watch the person or area long or well enough, they don't see the crime.

One property I worked at kept receiving anonymous calls reporting that the purchasing manager was up to something with a supplier. We did watch the individual a number of times, but never saw him do anything wrong. We later found that he was awarding contracts to the same supplier and was getting kickbacks. While we wouldn't have seen something on camera, a proper investigation would have located that information. In this case we dropped the ball too soon.

In another case, we received information from the payroll manager that one of her employees was suspected of stealing money from the purses of her fellow employees when they were out of the room. We set up a hidden camera over one employee's desk where her purse was kept, gave her money to put into the purse, and told her to leave both when she went on break. As we were waiting for things to develop, I went into my office and left the close watch in the hands of one of our agents with the explicit instructions "Don't take your eyes off that purse." I happened to glance up at the monitor in my office where the hidden camera was also displayed and immediately saw the suspect place her hand into the purse and take the cash. I waited to hear the agent yell out something like "I caught her" or "She took it," but I heard nothing. I ran out to the room and saw the agent talking to one of the other agents. He had taken his eyes off the purse and missed the theft. By the time we dispatched security, the suspect had made it out to her car with the cash. Luckily she admitted to everything and gave up the money.

The above is a typical close watch situation. Unless you assign the right person with explicit instructions, it will fail.

### **Tips for Successful Close Watches**

- Obtain as much of the necessary and relevant information to the case at the beginning. You may never get another chance. Get everything you can.
- Never, ever, take received information lightly, no matter how unlikely it seems. I have seen this type of information turn out to be correct more often than wrong.

- Assign close watches to your best people. You can't take the chance that the signature event will be missed.
- Take the time to put in writing the facts and beliefs of the case as you know them. Put this in a case file along with everything your investigators may need for the case. Include photos of suspects, schedules, pertinent policy and procedures, and so forth. Your people shouldn't have to hunt for anything. It should be at their fingertips.
- Assign a case manager to supervise the case. You need one person you can call and get updates from (and hold accountable).
- Ask for results daily. Close watches tend to start off strong, then, slowly lose momentum. Keep your people focused on this critical task.
- Be patient! Close watches are notorious for how long they can take. Don't get discouraged or let your people get discouraged. Usually you will find what you're looking for.