Smithsonian Institution
Office of the Inspector General

In Brief

Access Controls
Report Number M-05-05, July 25, 2006

Why We Did This Audit

This is the first of three reports covering security issues at the Smithsonian. To protect property and collections and provide a safe, secure environment for its employees and visitors, the Smithsonian relies in part on its electronic access control systems. We initiated this review to assess the effectiveness of these access controls, which are critical to ensure that employees and contractors who have left the Institution no longer have access to non-public areas of Smithsonian facilities.

What We Recommended

We recommended that OPS revise written policies and procedures to clarify where to surrender employee and contractor badges and proximity cards and specify responsibility for returning contractor badges and proximity cards. We also recommended that OPS provide department heads with access system reports to identify separated employees and contractors and ensure that records for separated employees and contractors are disabled instead of deleted from access control systems.

Management agreed with our analyses and recommendations and proposed an implementation plan that responds to our recommendations.

What We Found

Employees who left the Institution generally returned their ID badges and proximity cards; however, the Smithsonian's Office of Protection Services (OPS) was not always vigilant in removing programmed access to facilities. Of the 118 terminated employees we sampled, we found that 8 employees, or 7 percent, did not return their ID badges/proximity cards. All but one retained electronic access to non-public areas in various Smithsonian buildings, including collections storage areas. These employees did not submit properly completed exit clearance forms, and department heads did not ensure that exit clearance procedures were followed. In addition, 18 employees, or 15 percent, who had promptly returned their ID badge/proximity cards did not have their electronic access completely removed.

We found that, according to access control records, a significant number of terminated contractors still had access to Smithsonian facilities. Of the 73 contractors reviewed, 21, or 29 percent, had unexpired badges, of which 8, or 11 percent, also had active proximity cards providing electronic access to Smithsonian facilities after their departure date. The Institution has no standardized process for returning contractor ID badges and proximity cards and relied on department heads and Contracting Officer's Technical Representatives (COTRs) to terminate contractors' access.

In addition to the weaknesses in the exit clearance process, we found that OPS did not provide adequate oversight to ensure access was promptly terminated for separated employees and contractors. OPS also generally did not periodically review system records to ensure access was removed when individuals left the Institution. Moreover, OPS did not maintain historical information on badges and building access issued to separated individuals, information that would be needed for law enforcement action should a theft occur.