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COMMERCIAL PROPERTY: Security Systems; The New Watchmen: TV Monitors and Computers

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EVERY day a video-production facility at 17 State Street in downtown Manhattan pumps out more than 100 epic-length features. None will ever win an Emmy; most will not even win an audience of one.

The videos - each capturing six hours in the life of stairwells and emergency exits - are part of the security operation at the new office tower overlooking Battery Park.

Wires from 50 cameras, concealed inside and outside the building, lead to a basement bunker with 21 television monitors. Pictures flash from one camera angle to another, and lock onto trouble spots whenever alarms trigger a flashing light mounted on the ceiling. Nearby, a bank of video-cassette recorders provides the electromagnetic memory of scenes rarely more eventful than people primping themselves in elevator cabs.

If a crime is reported, the building management team can delve into the video files to see if there is footage of the suspect in action. And to help collar the suspect, a video presentation titled "Do You Know This Man?" plays in the lobby.

"We run the videos for about two weeks," said Kate Sheehan, the assistant building manager. "Longer than that, they would get a little boring."

The combination of computerized wizardry and creative flair has given 17 State Street the reputation as a secure building - a valuable asset in Manhattan, where office vacancies and crime rates are both high.

"With all the alarms, motion detectors, cameras and computerized systems available today, a building can have one or two guards dispatched by radio and a central station manned by two guys - instead of 15 guys running around, turning keys and patrolling hallways," said Richard Welter, a principal of Facilities Technology Consultants, a Massachusetts firm that designs security systems for office buildings.

"In the old days, unless a watchman saw a incident, it would go undetected," he explained. "Electronic security has the eyes and ears to detect problems everywhere at all times."

But problems often arise when poorly trained workers are hired to oversee the electronic sensors. "An owner will spend millions on a security system, then turn it over to guy who is just barely

breathing," Mr. Welter said.

Besides concealing video cameras throughout their buildings, owners today are beginning to install computerized gatekeepers that control the movements of office workers, each carrying a card similar in design to an automatic-teller card.