

WORLDSCO IN LOCKDOWN AFTER RISKOMETER TRIPPED

Staff at Worldco were locked into their offices for two hours last Monday after a device that monitors corporate risk was accidentally set off. The device, which is deployed throughout the "smart" building Worldco has occupied since late May, uses audio and video sensors to assess risk and take appropriate action for violations of everything from Worldco's social responsibility code of practice to accounting policies and health and safety legislation. The response level reached, which is the highest possible, is triggered after detecting some form of immediate and severe physical risk.

Rutger Rienks, CTO of Cotton Wool Inc., admitted the company's development team had been caught snoozing. "The sound and dialogue on computer games gets more realistic all the time, and in this case the video feed was obscured by someone standing in front of the camera, so the system couldn't see what was happening. The fact that internet gaming violates Worldco's computer use policy just tipped the balance," he remarked. The gaffe has revealed flaws in Worldco's induction procedures, since angry staff claimed to have thought the cameras were used only during remote meetings. The company is currently in emergency negotiations with Amicus, the union that represents the majority of its staff, to clarify their data protection stance.

The WorldCo building is the first workspace to have in-built risk detection, but the system is scheduled for deployment in around 100 other buildings over the next year. Although this setback could give Cotton Wool's venture capitalists cold feet, Rienks has brought a number of simpler smart office devices to market without a hitch. In 2008, he introduced the Perkomat, a coffee machine that monitors a meeting and brews automatically when a meeting is stagnating; analysts claim it can lead to productivity gains of 10% for some groups. An enhanced version, introduced in 2010, passes frozen cookie dough through an oven when sensors detect a deterioration in interpersonal relationships during a meeting. Worldco's risk detector is an adaptation of Rienks' recent foray into the childcare market with the NannyBop, a device that mixes audio capture from a bedroom or play area with music on a standard iPod to simulate the rough level of background noise, breaking in with alerts when the child's activity violates some user-settable constraints. The lockdown is estimated to have cost Worldco £7 million. Cotton Wool plans a software patch to address the issue for mid-October, but meanwhile has reset the system to turn off automatic intervention.

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