



REMOTE-CONTROL DOORS: A technician demonstrates how an SMS sent via a PDA phone to a central operations centre can unlock access doors under the new security system.

OOI BOON KEONG

With an SMS, your water supply is safe

New technology ensures vital areas in HDB blocks can be accessed only by those authorised to do so

LEE CHING WERN

chingwern@newstoday.com.sg

TEENAGE couples go there for some privacy. Mischievous kids love playing there. Residents use them as extended store-rooms.

This is how pump rooms, switchboard rooms and rooftop areas in HDB blocks – all vital to the water and electricity supply to residents – are being used.

However, these seemingly harmless activities are security breaches and to address this matter, Aljunied Town Council is investing some \$2 million in technology that allows for real-time monitoring and access control to these areas through the simple act of sending an SMS.

The first in Singapore to launch such an exercise, Aljunied Town Council is in the process of installing the automated system in 100 blocks and intends to have it in all of its 500 blocks by 2010.

Mdm Cynthia Phua, MP and chairman of Aljunied Town Council, told TODAY: "Sometimes workers or contractors leave the doors unlocked after maintenance work, allowing anyone to enter. Also, the current lock-and-key system is inadequate because keys can be duplicated."

The result: A free-for-all.

"We had youths going up to the rooftop with their girlfriends, and teenage boys going up to play. Some, possibly residents or cleaners, even throw mattresses and bulky items there," said Mdm Phua.

"We had a shock when we saw a table-tennis table and a huge Winnie the Pooh soft toy in one of the pump rooms," said Mr

Clarence Tan, senior manager of CPG facilities management, which is helping the town council with the installation of the technology.

In some instances, what seems like harmless mischief or neglect can lead to serious consequences.

Once, someone switched off the pump in one of the blocks in Aljunied GRC, leading to a shortage of water for the entire block for several hours.

Three years ago, five young boys were caught dumping soap powder into the water tank on the rooftop of a flat at Payar Lebar Way, which comes under the purvey of Marine Parade Town Council.

"It could be dangerous. Contractors sometimes leave unwanted items such as extra pipes, concrete and bags of sands lying around.

"All these could lead to the contamination or disruption of our electricity or water supplies. If there happens to be a can of paint, a spark of fire can lead to an explosion.

"So, we had to do something about it," said Mdm Phua.

Under the new system, access is given only to authorised personnel, a record of whom will be kept at the operations centre. They can open the access doors by calling or sending an SMS to the operations centre, which keeps track of movement in and out of the rooms.

If a door is not closed within 30 seconds, an SMS alert will be sent to all relevant property officers. Any malfunction – such as a power trip, pump failure or falling water-tank level – will also trigger SMS alarms.

Said Mdm Phua on the new technology: "We have always felt that these installations are important. And now we have this technology which is effective and affordable at the same time."