

# Security guard industry lacks standards, training

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Despite playing a more important role in the wake of 9/11, the security guard industry remains plagued by inadequate training and standards in many states, indicates new research by Michigan State University criminologists.

Formal [training](#) of the nation's 1 million-plus private [security](#) officers is widely neglected, a surprising finding when contrasted with other private occupations such as paramedics, childcare workers and even cosmetologists, said Mahesh Nalla, lead investigator and MSU professor of criminal justice.

By and large, [security guards](#) say they're unprepared to handle problematic people and physical altercations and to protect themselves. They strongly endorse the need for systematic and standardized training in the \$7 billion-a-year industry.

"It's reasonable to conclude that private security continues to be an under-regulated industry despite the increase in the roles private security guards play in people's lives and the fact that they greatly outnumber sworn police officers in America," Nalla said.

The number of unarmed security guards has roughly doubled since 1980, to about 1.1 million, compared with about 833,000 police officers. The threat of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks raised awareness of the role security guards could play in intelligence sharing with law enforcement.

Given security guards' increased role, Nalla and colleagues studied whether states have kept up by strengthening minimum standards and requirements.

That study, published in *Security Journal*, found no dramatic increase in the stringency of industry regulations since 1982. In fact, many states still lack any training standards – meaning security guards must learn on the job if their company doesn't provide training – while some states do not require any minimum education or even a criminal background check for guards.

A second study by Nalla, also in *Security Journal*, drew on in-depth interviews with security officers. While some guards were able to improvise based on previous experience as [police officers](#), many others believed the lack of training was a hindrance to performing their tasks effectively.

Nalla noted private security is a relatively low-paying industry with high turnover, which can make it difficult to recruit qualified guards, especially for small security companies. He added that many other regions around the world, including Australia and Europe, have stricter standards and accountability for their private security industry.

Provided by Michigan State University

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