

Security officers much sought-after

Agencies are dangling higher salaries and various bonuses to attract and retain staff

Melissa Pang

When former army platoon sergeant Daren Tan switched to the private security industry in 2001, he earned \$1,700 as a security supervisor.

Today, someone just starting out in the industry can expect to be paid that amount.

Factors such as a higher demand

for staff and a high turnover rate have led to improved pay in the private security market.

Starting salaries have risen from as low as \$800 five years ago to between \$1,300 and \$1,800 today.

Various agencies also dangle joining, end-of-contract and performance bonuses.

Certis Cisco, for instance, offers a joining bonus of \$4,000 for auxiliary police officers and \$1,000 for protection officers. The 6,500-strong agency believes it was the first in the industry to introduce this carrot.

To get the bonus, new hires are required to stay at least a year.

New hires at Aetos Security Management have to stay a minimum of six months to receive the \$500 joining bonus.

Apro Asian Protection pays out its \$1,000 joining bonus over two tranches. The aim is to achieve stability, said Mr Ignatius Kang, general manager of the agency which employs 600 security officers.

"In the past, we had people who changed their mind about the job within days. Candidates now have to seriously consider and fully understand the requirements of the contract."

But the supply shortage means employees can, to some extent, be picky about assignments.

"Being a guard at RWS is better than being a guard at a warehouse. People prefer a more comfortable environment," said Ms Doria Tan, D'Garde Security's administrative and quality assurance assistant manager.

To boost the job's allure, agencies such as Ademco Security allow staff to work flexible hours. Special care is taken to place staff at locations close to their homes "for convenience and to minimise travel time and expense", said Ademco's managing director, Mr Toby Koh.

The agency has about 180 guards.

A poor public perception of the

job led the Security Industry Regulatory Department to introduce last year the issuance of common identification cards to improve professionalism.

According to the Workforce Development Agency's website, the industry currently comprises 37,000 security personnel. It states that an estimated 3,500 additional security officers are needed in the three years between last year and next year.

Singapore's hosting of major international events and the integrated resorts' opening have added to the demand.

Mr Patrick Tay, executive secre-

tary of the 10,000-strong Union of Security Employees, urges more people to consider a career in the industry.

"We've seen many who worked hard and made their way up, including some who became bosses of security companies."

Mr Daren Tan, 40, is one such example. After almost nine years in the industry, he now has a diploma in security management and is operations manager at Apro Asian Protection.

He earns more than \$3,000 a month.

"The key is to work hard and keep upgrading yourself," he said.

melpang@sph.com.sg