



Alarm System Facts



Introduction:

Your Police and Sheriff's Departments have prepared this pamphlet to provide you with a basic knowledge of alarm systems to give you insight into considerations you should have in mind when assessing alarm companies.

Case studies reveal most burglars are deterred by the mere presence of an alarm system. Burglars attack unprotected homes considerably more often than homes protected by alarm systems, so an alarm system can greatly minimize your losses.

Though an alarm system is an excellent defense, the best defense is through a combination of efforts:

1. Participation in Block Watch and Operation Identification.
2. Solidly built doors hung on well-fitted doorframes.
3. Doors properly secured with high quality dead bolt locks with a 1" throw.
4. Windows that will resist forced entry via auxiliary locking devices.
5. Use of proper lighting.
6. Use of a quality burglar alarm system.

Many Police and Sheriff's Departments have been plagued by false alarms and consequently have had to resort to false ordinances. Most ordinances require alarmed homes or businesses to file an Alarm/Emergency Response Card with the Police/Sheriff's Department and provide for a series of fines to be levied against those homes or businesses with excessive false alarms. Therefore, it is important that you get (and maintain) a good, reliable system.

The type of system that will be best for you depends on many different factors – your security needs, type of valuables, type of premises to be protected, your life-style, and animals in the home, etc.

It is important to shop around. What may appear to be an alarm system "bargain" could actually prove to be a severely compromised or extremely limited alarm system.

Advantages of an Alarm System

1. The mere fact that an alarm system exists is often a sufficient deterrent to discourage a burglar even before he tries to force an entry.
2. Knowing you and your property are secure increases peace of mind.
3. Most insurance companies give a reduction on homeowner's insurance when an alarm system has been installed. Be sure to check with your agent for details.

Local Versus Monitored Alarm

- ✓ A “local” alarm is one, which activates a bell, siren, and /or strobe light outside your home or business. It could scare away an intruder, but authorities are not notified unless someone hearing the alarm calls in.
- ✓ A “monitored” alarm means you pay a monthly fee to your alarm company or some other monitoring service to monitor your alarm 24 hours a day through some central facility. They then notify your local law enforcement agency should your system be activated. The best approach is to have both an outside siren and monitored system.

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Wired Versus Wireless

“Wired” simply means all components of the system are connected to each other by electrical wire, usually offering more proven reliability.

“Wireless” systems rely on transmitting signals between components, much like radio signals. “Wireless” systems are growing in popularity as the technology improves. A good system costs about the same as a hardwired system. Things to look for in wireless systems are:

1. A supervised system. The control panel and sensors are constantly sending each other signals.
2. The control panel is in a locked and tamper-proof area.
3. The sensor sends two signals to activate the control panel.
4. The transmitters are tamper-proof.

How to Select an Alarm Company

1. Contact at least 5 local alarm companies.
2. Are they members of the Washington State Burglar & Fire Alarm Association? (800) 248-9272.
3. Have each company appraise your security needs and make suggestions on the system they recommend. Obtain a written proposal that includes the recommendations and all associated cost factors of components, installation, service, etc.
4. Contact at least three previous customers of the alarm companies, where possible, to obtain their opinion of the system and service they have received. A reputable company will not hesitate to provide you with names of satisfied customers.
5. Does your local government require special licenses and registration before installation?
6. Make sure you understand the system. Be aware of what it can and cannot do. Receive oral and written instructions covering all circumstances involving the system operation and instructions on testing the system.
7. Consider having duress/medic remote sensors installed along with your burglar alarm system. Fire sensors are important tool your total package price won't be significantly improved. Have the alarm company give you a bid on all these features.

Do It Yourself

Depending on the system, the skill required to install it on your own ranges from a little to a lot. Often the wiring of a system is not the only thing you need to know about. Sensor location can make the difference between a system that works properly and one that is a false alarm nightmare. In addition, there may be difficulty in finding someone to monitor or service the equipment.

Questions to ask an Alarm Company Salesperson

1. Is the firm established, with a history of performance and service?
2. Does the alarm company have insurance to cover the cost of any damage to your property caused by the company during installation?
3. Are the company and installers properly licensed and bonded? Is anything sub-contracted (installation, service, monitoring)?
4. Is the central monitoring station U/L Approved? Where is it located?
5. Is the system equipped with a battery backup? Is the battery rechargeable?
6. If you are alarming a business, does the system have a robbery/duress mode for use during open business hours?
7. Does the company offer a written guarantee? What is guaranteed and for how long? Are parts and labor covered?

Basic Parts of an Alarm System

All alarm systems involving three basic parts; the control panel, the sensors, and the means of annunciation or letting someone know that there has been a problem (outside siren, or a central station phoning the police, or both). The control panel is the brain of an alarm system. It receives signals from the sensors and determines what must be done. A good control panel can be the difference between an easy to use system or a very difficult one. Sensors are the means by which your control panel is notified that there is a problem. Annunciation is how people are alerted to the alarm.

Sensory Devices Commonly Used and How they Work:

Perimeter Protection:

1. Magnetic contacts: Most commonly used, electromechanical device that activates when the magnet and contact are separated. Used mainly on doors and windows, most magnetic contacts used in home applications are concealed.
2. Window screens: Specially contracted screens that contain inconspicuous alarm wires. Activates when ripped, torn or removed.
3. Foil Tape: Thin metallic tape. Activates when the foil is torn or broken. Used primarily in commercial applications.
4. Sound Discriminators: Sound-sensing devices that activate an alarm after detecting specific sounds. These can often be prone to false alarm since they don't discriminate between legitimate noises and those of an actual break-in.

Interior Protection:

1. Passive Infrared Sensors: Detects infrared heat generated by the presence of a body heat within a protected area. Most common type of interior sensor used when animals are not a concern.
2. Pressure Mats: A pressure sensitive flat pad, which activates when, stepped on. Heavy travel can cause mats to malfunction.
3. Photoelectric beams: Transmits an invisible beam across a protected area and activates alarm when interrupted.
4. Motion Detector: Alarm activated by any movement in an area. Sensors can be either Ultrasonic or Microwave sensory devices. Can be prone to false alarm.
5. Panic Button: Allows you to activate an alarm system manually with push of a button. Either remote (wireless) or fixed station. Great for medical problems tool.
6. Impact Activated Microphones: Microphones that transmit sounds to a receiver at a central location. Can detect breaking glass and voices.

Study the Contract:

1. What services are offered, such as a maintenance contract, central station monitoring, 24 hour response for repair service?
2. What equipment is leased/owned by you?
3. What is the policy for canceling monitoring services (e.g. minimum term or is only one cancellation per year allowed)?
4. What is the equipment repair policy?
5. What is the policy on service charges after the warranty expires?
6. What is the policy on false alarm billings?

Recommended System

An ideal system includes:

1. Central station monitoring including local alarm (outside siren)
2. Sensors on perimeter doors and vulnerable windows.
3. Sensors protecting the interior.
4. Stationary or remote "Panic Button".
5. Fire Sensors.
6. Place stickers/signs advertising and alarm system is installed.

Agencies to Consult when Checking on Alarm Companies

- * Washington State Burglar and Fire Alarm Association; (800) 248-9272
- * Better Business Bureau, <http://www.bbb.org/>
- * Chambers of Commerce
- * Washington State Attorney General; Consumer Protection Division; (800) 551-4636