

Security Alarm Systems

Why should I have a security alarm system?

Having a security alarm system may decrease the chances of a burglary. Even if the alarm system does not keep a burglar from breaking in, it may cause the burglar to stay a shorter amount of time.

What Should a Security Alarm System Include?

Most systems rely on a combination of contacts placed at doors and windows and motion sensors.

It is best that all exterior potential points of entry have contacts that sense when they are open. Glass break sensors are also available and recommended.

Motion sensors should **not** be used as the primary means of detection because they do not detect someone until they are already in the house.

The basic elements of a standard home security system include:

- **Control panel:** This is where the system wiring terminates, the backup battery is located and where it is connected to the phone lines if it is a monitored system.
- **Keypad:** This is where the system is armed and disarmed.
- **Siren**
- **Inside motion detector:** These sense changes in a room caused by human presence. Special motion detectors are available for people who have pets.
- **Door and window contacts;** This sounds the alarm when the door or window is opened (and the system is on).
- **A central monitoring station (Company):** If the system is monitored, and the alarm is set off, the control panel sends a message to a central monitoring station, which is manned 24 hours a day.

After attempting to contact the homeowner, the central monitoring station will contact the police, fire department, or medics.

There is usually a monthly fee for this service.

Additional items that can be added to the basic system are:

- **Smoke detectors**
- **Glass break detectors**
- **Panic buttons**
- **Pressure mats for under rugs**
- **Closed circuit TV** to allow monitoring and/or recording inside or outside a home.
- **Alarm screens for windows.**

Costs

Costs of systems vary. Many security companies offer the systems for free - in exchange for long-term monitoring contracts.

Monitored System or Unmonitored System?

Monitored systems typically work as follows:

1. The security system senses something.
2. The security system waits 30 to 45 seconds to give the homeowner a chance to deactivate the system to prevent false alarms.
3. If the alarm is not deactivated the security system sends a message to the monitoring company over telephone lines.
4. The monitoring company receives the message and verifies the alarm, generally by placing a phone call to the home. If they do not receive the proper password or do not receive an answer, they call the police.
5. The police respond.

Unmonitored systems typically have on-site alarms and/or flashing lights. It relies on neighbors to call police.

Neighbors or passersby should never investigate an alarm themselves.

With an unmonitored system, it is best to have a combination of strobe lights and alarms. They should be located on the street side of the house and in an inaccessible spot as possible. It is best to discuss the installation with your neighbors and to place the siren and flashing light on the house where it can be easily seen.

How to choose an alarm company

Choosing an alarm company can be confusing and the technology complicated. Here are some suggestions:

- Check with friends or neighbors for recommendations on reliable companies.

- Find out how quickly the alarm company will install your system after purchase. See if the company sells systems faster than they can install them.
- Determine how quickly they respond to requests for service after installation. Ask for references from some of their customers who have required service and call and talk to these people.
- Ask about warranties.
- Obtain quotes from at least three different companies.
- Ask the alarm company what screening they do when hiring their alarm installers and salespeople. You want a company that screens for criminal backgrounds/records, etc.
- Call your local police department and ask how long it takes them to respond to a home security system alarm. Don't be surprised if the estimated response time is as long as an hour. Also ask if there are any fines for false alarms.
- Lastly, when comparing prices remember to compare detection coverage and features. Not all alarms are created equal.

Things to Remember About Security Alarm Systems

Burglars realize most security systems sound inside the house and then the alarm is transferred to remote locations through the telephone lines.

Most phone lines are typically exposed on the outside of the house in an easily accessible location where the phone line can be cut. If the telephone line is cut, the security alarm system cannot notify the central monitoring station of the break-in.

If the phone line is run underground until it is inside the home (with the main telephone junction box inside the home), the thief cannot tamper with the telephone line until after he or she has broken in.

Having a protected phone line to your house is a good idea whether you have a security alarm system or not.

Remember: Security systems do not prevent thieves from breaking into homes.

A good security plan should include strong [window, door and lock products](#) and [good security habits](#).