



Crime Prevention Fact Sheet

“Understand Alarms”

Reducing Criminal Opportunity

March 2005



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Effective alarm systems serve as a deterrent to intruders, aid in alerting the police to problems, and provide peace of mind while you are away from your home or business. Alarm systems and their applications vary. You need to know if a particular alarm system will provide the expected security. Before investing in an alarm system, you should consider the following information.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

Is your residence or business vulnerable to intruders? If your doors and windows are vulnerable to attack, an alarm system alone will not secure the premises. Addressing the physical security of the premises should be your first priority. You should first replace hollow core doors with metal or solid core doors; install high security deadbolts; ensure strike plates are adequately anchored; and, ensure all windows are equipped with adequate latching mechanisms. Proper physical security increases the effectiveness of your alarm system. An alarm system should compliment other security components, but cannot stand alone to create an entire security strategy.

SECURITY STRATEGY

An effective security strategy incorporates a concept known as the Three D's: **Deter, Detect, Delay**. Detering is advertising the fact an alarm system is in place and appropriate measures have been taken to secure the property. Detecting is the primary function of the alarm system and involves notification to a responding party the perimeter is being breached. Delaying is the primary function of physical security measures such as the solid core doors, deadbolts, and adequately anchored strike plates. An example of utilizing the three D's is the application of a two-door system. The exterior door is alarmed, while the interior door is a security door. Once the exterior door has been defeated, the alarm activates. While the alarm has been activated, entry still is delayed into the home/business. The interior door allows time for a response to the alarm. The intruder is

faced with a dilemma: stay and risk apprehension by responding units or flee the scene.

PROTECT YOUR PROTECTION

Alarm systems are designed to aid in the protection of your personal property. Although alarm systems are a security tool, they are vulnerable to attack. What measures are employed by the alarm company to protect your security system? Most alarm systems are dependent on the phone line for their ability to make notification to the alarm company and the police. What if the phone line was inoperable or sabotaged? Does your alarm system still have the capability to make a notification? Three back-up systems are available for phone lines: cellular phones, radios and dedicated phone lines. More important than the phone line is the alarm system's power source. All alarm systems require electrical power. What if power was suddenly interrupted? The [winter storms of February 2002 and October 1996](#) resulted in power outages for days. This is a prime example of how the electrical system can be interrupted for an extended period of time. Most alarm systems come with some form of alternate-battery power. Most alarm systems have battery back-up which can sustain the



Battery shown in a control panel

operation of the system for 4 to 24 hours. Some questions to ask your alarm representative are: What is the number of hours an alternate power source can sustain the alarm system? In the event the battery runs low, does the system alert the company? Does the battery still operate the siren and any other integrated audible and visual aids? These important questions should be



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answered to your satisfaction before purchasing an alarm system.

AUDIBLE AND VISUAL AIDS

A quality alarm system will utilize both audible and visual aids once an intrusion has been detected. With any alarm system, an intruder knows a cushion of time exists between when they trigger the alarm system and the time someone responds to investigate. By utilizing audible aids (bells or sirens) on the exterior of the property, witnesses nearby are now alerted to an alarm activation. Individuals in the area of an alarm may hear it, but may be unable to isolate exactly where the alarm is located. Some type of visual aid such as a strobe or flashing lights will help to immediately draw attention to the affected premises. Audible and



Note the outside audible and strobe above the garage door to maximize the witness potential of the neighborhood.

visual aids will severely limit the intruder’s time, or eliminate an intruder’s threat altogether. An intruder wants to avoid being seen, identified or apprehended. The use of audible and visual aids increases the effectiveness of any alarm system, even if the phone line has been severed or defeated. The annunciation of an intruder is still being made to surrounding neighbors, even if the alarm company is not receiving notification an intrusion is taking place.

DELAY

Some amount of a **delay** is built into all alarm systems to allow the resident time to disarm it. During criminal incidents, delays only work in

favor of the intruder. Most delays are 30 to 45 seconds in length. Video tapes of actual burglaries show intruders spending as little as 50 seconds in a business hauling away a substantial amount of merchandise. The delay on an alarm system should be as short as possible, and even non-existent in some circumstances. Only one door should have a delay to allow legitimate entry by homeowners and employees. All other points of entry and areas alarmed should have immediate annunciation and notification.



Key pads to disarm your systems should be within close proximity of the entry point. This can help minimize false alarms.

An adequate security system should be designed specifically for **YOUR** business or home. The alarm company should take into account your needs, expectations, concerns, lifestyle and budget. An alarm system does not come in a pre-arranged package. A reputable company should be able to deliver satisfactory protection to reasonably fit most budgets. Be wary of the company willing to quote a price over the telephone, without making a careful and detailed survey of your home or business. Be sure to obtain a **detailed written, description** of what you are buying!



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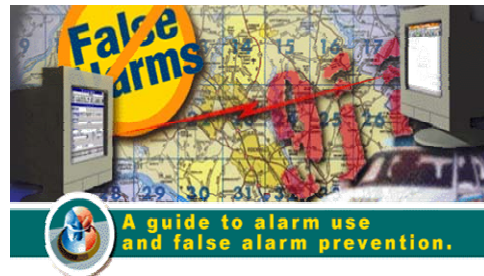
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FALSE ALARMS

In Overland Park, 99% of all alarms reported to the Police Department are false. Over 50% of those false alarms were a result of user error. In 2004, the Police Department received 6,532 alarm activations. Of the 6,532 alarms, only 37 were activated as the result of actual burglaries. Make sure you understand your system thoroughly! Be aware of what it can and cannot do. Be familiar with its operating details and obtain verbal and written instructions covering all of its functions. Check to see if animals, hanging signs, or rapid climate changes caused by the heating and cooling system will activate the alarm system. Preventive maintenance to an alarm system should be as routine as changing the oil in your car. Proper preventive maintenance will assist in identifying any problems and minimize your exposure to false alarms.

The City of Overland Park has an ordinance designed to reduce the number of false alarms. Upon the third false activation of an alarm system, the Police Department will begin fining alarm users. Fines can be as high as \$250 for each false alarm. After the tenth false alarm, the Chief of Police has the option to completely cancel police response to an alarm address. Alarm systems are only as effective as the responses they generate. In Overland Park, the average response time to an alarm address is approximately eight (8) minutes. The average burglary takes only two to three (2-3) minutes.

The City of Overland Park offers a False Alarm Prevention Class to residents and business owners. The class educates alarm users about the city’s alarm ordinance; instructs participants how to obtain an alarm permit; discusses incorporation an overall security strategy; and, explains how to maximize the effectiveness of an alarm system. If you are interested in attending the class, contact, the Alarm Coordinator at 913-327-6722.



SUMMARY

Several measures may be utilized to ensure the proper selection of an alarm system. Don’t wait until the alarm company representative is in your home or office before you consider the professional reliability of an alarm company. Investigate the company’s credibility before meeting with their representative. The Better Business Bureau, Consumer Protection Agency and Chamber of Commerce are excellent sources to research a company’s professionalism and dependability. Are they a member of the Kansas City Burglar and Fire Alarm Association? Ask for the names of randomly selected customers. A reputable alarm company will not hesitate to provide references and credentials upon request.

OPPD + KCBFAA + YOU

Traits of a Good Alarm Company

- Provide a written instruction manual
- Provide clear training at installation
- Willing to provide free refresher training
- Available to answer follow-up questions
- Prompt & effective repair of the system
- Alarm verification by telephone call, video or audio built into your system
- Proactive about identifying and correcting the causes of false alarms

Should you have additional questions, please contact Officer Mike Betten at (913)895-6334 (email: mike.betten@opkansas.org) or the Alarm Coordinator’s Office at (913)327-6722.



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Consider the following questions of an alarm representative:

Is the alarm representative selling a police response, a neighborhood response or both?

The average response by a police agency to a security system is 15 minutes. As mentioned in the article, alarms are very dependent on the type of response generated. The alarm industry sells a police response; however, a neighborhood response can be just as effective and more efficient. Neighbors can verify an actual burglary and immediately notify the police. A burglar’s greatest fear is being detected and having that information forwarded to the police. Maximize the burglar’s fear with an outside audible aid and strobe light. The disadvantage to this strategy is continuous false alarms will cause your neighbors a great deal of irritation. This diminishes the effectiveness of a neighborhood response.

Is the system being purchased or leased?

Some alarm companies require the customer to sign a two or three-year monitoring contract. In some cases, that agreement is a lease and not an actual purchase. After the contract for the monitoring has expired, does the customer or the alarm company own the system?

Does the system have some type of phone line protection?

If the alarm company is selling a police response, what precautions have been taken to protect the phone line? Some companies claim that if the phone line is cut, the alarm will activate. This could be true; however, it will not generate a call to the central monitoring station to summon a police response. Occasionally phone lines are tested or go dead, and a false alarm could be triggered. Careful considerations should be given to phone line protection.

Has the alarm company addressed your specific needs or are they selling the “cookie cutter” package?

Your specific concerns should be determined before there is an attempt to sell an alarm system. Are you getting an alarm system for your specific home, or are being sold a “standard” system? The standard system includes: three (3) contacts, one (1) motion detector, a keypad and an inside audible. Will the typical system adequately cover your house and provide the protection you expect? If not, consult with other alarm companies or an independent security professional.

Is the alarm company familiar with the Overland Park alarm ordinance?

Alarm users are required to obtain an alarm permit prior to activating their alarm system. The Overland Park Police may not respond to an alarm that has not obtain a permit. After two false alarms within a one-year period, the police department can charge fines for each false alarm. Fines can increase to \$250 per response.

What is the recommended maintenance schedule for an alarm system?

Alarms are mechanical devices, and they will require routine maintenance. Periodic maintenance is necessary to minimize the chances of generating a false alarm. Is the periodic maintenance included in the monthly monitoring fee, or does it result in an additional charge? Motion detectors require cleaning, door contacts can become stuck and back-up batteries can become inoperable. It is strongly suggested every alarm user inspect their alarm system annually.

What amount of time delay is built into the alarm system.

The delay is designed to give the alarm user adequate time to deactivate the system during routine activities. However, this is time that the burglar can use to commit the burglary. Some companies have a standard 45-second delay. Ideally, the shorter the delay, the less time the criminal has to commit the crime.