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Alarm Systems

By: Cst. Tom McKay

Be Alarmed

It's a deterrent to intruders, a way of alerting police, and a means of giving you peace of mind when your workplace is closed. No doubt, an alarm is a wise business investment. Before making that investment, or even if you already have an alarm installed, make sure that your system is offering the security you expect.

First, ask yourself if the alarm is integrated into a broader crime prevention strategy. Do windows and doors have adequate locks? Are other possible entry points, such as air vents, secure? Is your premise properly lit? Do shrubs or other obstacles block the view between the window and the street? Do you control access to your site?

Vulnerable to Intruders

If your other security measures are lax, you are probably vulnerable to intruders, even if you install a sophisticated alarm system. Review all of your crime prevention techniques, and see how an alarm system will augment them, not replace them.

There are dozens of companies out there who advertise themselves as experts in business security. You have many vendors to pick from, so choose wisely. Get at least three estimates, and ask for references. Your goal is to get the most security for your budget.

Discuss with these prospective suppliers, just why you're installing an alarm and what you expect from it. The extent of the system's coverage, the way it is installed, it's ease of operation, the way it's monitored, the monitoring station's procedures for filtering out false alarms and alerting you -- all of these must suit the needs of your particular business.

Beware of False Alarms

Having an alarm system is a deterrent to intruders. Those warning stickers alone are enough to persuade some would-be thieves to pick another target. If they happen to break in anyway, the odds are they'd be out in a hurry when the alarm goes off, reducing your losses.

Of course, when the alarm is triggered the idea is to have the police respond. The best way to ensure that: **avoid false alarms.**

Over 96% of alarm calls are false. The reasons vary. Maybe the system malfunctions. Perhaps someone activates it accidentally. Or the user tests it without telling the monitoring station. The motion detector might even pick up an animal, or a plant that sways from the air conditioning. Whatever way they occur, false alarms divert police away from genuine emergencies and more pressing duties.

The onus is on the alarm user -- to ensure the system has been professionally installed, and that it's in working order, and that anyone activating or deactivating it knows what they're doing. With the alarm operating properly and the police ready to respond, business owners can be assured that they're doing what they can to protect their property.

Also see the Alarm Policy fact sheet...