

HOME, SAFE HOME

Security systems keep property safe and peace of mind secure.

BY VINCENT RHODES

No one wants to think about his home being burglarized. Installing a home security system can dramatically decrease the chance of a burglary, according to experts. This is especially true if the system is advertised with a sign on the lawn and stickers affixed to windows and doors.

"The crucial thing about a security system is that it gives peace of mind," explains Todd Hansen, spokesperson for Security Link from Ameritech.

Statistics cited by the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association indicate that homes without security systems are two to three times more likely to be broken into than homes with the systems.

And that's not the only reason to consider installation. Many systems report fires, floods and medical emergencies. Those are just a few of the reasons many insurance companies offer rate discounts for homes with security systems.

up battery pack for \$30, an external siren for \$17, a passive infrared motion detector for \$55 and additional door or window sensors for \$30.

The systems require no drilling or particular installation skills. "If you can peel a sticker, you can install the sensors," according to Fred Anthony, assistant store manager for the Norfolk Lowe's.

Once a Keepsafer system is installed, it can be linked to a computer monitoring station. If an alarm is triggered, the computer notifies the authorities.

Leaving it to the pros

Live monitoring is perhaps the biggest advantage to a professionally installed system. When an alarm is triggered, a security company representative calls to verify the emergency. If no one answers the call or the correct code is not given, the police are contacted. "It's like having a second set of eyes watching your house," Hansen explains.

Monitoring fees average about \$30 per month. These prices are often based on contracts that range anywhere from two to five years.

The other advantage of a professionally-installed package is customization. A well-designed system addresses the specific vulnerabilities of a residence—such as blind spots and obscured windows.

A professional examines a home and recommends the right components based on the buyer's lifestyle. The resident's schedule and whether the household includes children or pets help determine which equipment is appropriate.

Basic systems generally include a limited number of window or door sensors, an indoor siren, a master control unit with battery back-up, a keypad control and phone connection to the monitoring center. Some companies offer motion detectors and panic buttons that instantly trigger the alarm as part of their standard packages.

The National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association reports that the average price of a security system dropped from \$1,509 in 1990 to \$1,200 in 1998, and market competition and technological improvements continue to drive down prices. It's not uncommon to find companies offering their standard systems for as little \$100 to \$200 with the signing of a three-year monitoring contract.

Some companies provide additional options. Security Link, for example, offers high-end services such as keypads that integrate "smart home" technology to control temperature and lighting; cameras that allow residents real-time video access to their home via the web; and video applications that allow parents to check on the baby through the television, Hansen says.

Renters may want to consider installing a wireless system. No modifications are required to the home, and the system can be moved when the renter moves. Bureau of Justice Statistics report that in 1999 rented households were burglarized at rates 85 percent higher than owned households. **HR**



Doing it yourself

Residents have two options for improving security: self-installed equipment and professionally-installed systems. Do-it-yourself systems are available at building supply centers and hardware stores.

For example, Home Depot offers independent alarm/sensor combinations. Door or window sensors cost from \$7 to \$15. A motion detector with an unobstructed range of about 800 square feet costs \$15. A door sensor linked to a keypad costs \$20. These sensors do not communicate with a central control unit, so each houses its own alarm and batteries, and residents must turn each sensor on individually.

Lowe's offers integrated wireless systems that range from \$200 to \$300. A Keepsafer kits include a central control unit, some door or window sensors, a yard sign and a video tape instruction guide. System selection depends on the number of sensors required.

Buyers can purchase a remote keypad for \$37, a rechargeable back-