

HOME SECURITY

High-tech systems let home owners track own security

BY BOBBI IGNELZI
Copley News Service

Feeling a bit insecure about your dated home security system — haywire motion detectors, hard-to-remember access codes and random alarms?

Have no fear, high-tech monitoring is here. Advanced technology has fast-forwarded through many of the risks and inconveniences of residential security, giving homeowners more effective and powerful alarm systems.

Today's homeowners can choose from a variety of security options, including keyless lock systems that read thumb or palm prints, finely tuned microwave motion detectors and Internet access that allows you to check your living room while you're on vacation hundreds of miles away.

"This Jetson-type technology makes a security system fit the fabric of a family's life, offering them more confidence and security," said Jay Stuck, spokesman for Florida-based ADT Security Services, the country's largest alarm company.

Contrary to common belief, high-tech security systems aren't just for the ultrarich with precious valuables to safeguard.

"The really wealthy people are heavily insured and they don't care," said Brett

Bush of Rancho Santa Fe (Calif.) Security Systems. "High-tech security generally appeals to people who really value their privacy and appreciate convenience."

These systems are ideal for busy moms who don't have time to arm and disarm a system by pushing a series of buttons. It's perfect for senior citizens who may have difficulty remembering system codes. And, it's great for people who just like the idea of having state-of-the-art security in their home.

About 18 percent of U.S. households have dealer-installed security systems, according to a study by the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association. And, in 2002 (the last year for which data is available), American homeowners spent an estimated \$20.3 billion on professionally installed security products. The industry is growing by an estimated 8.6 percent each year, according to the study.

The hottest trend in home security is using broadband Internet connections to let security monitoring personnel and the homeowner see and hear inside the home.

A single camera or multiple units can be set up indoors or out, along with video motion detectors, to record up to a day's worth of activity in five-second spurts. Homeowners, using a

password, can view the recordings or access the streaming video and literally eyeball their home from the office or vacation condo thousands of miles away.

"The resolution may not be perfect, but you'll still be able to get a good idea of what's going on or who's in your house," says Rick Ostowicz, spokesman for the Washington, D.C.-based NBFAA.

You can set up certain security triggers which will notify you via e-mail, cell phone or personal digital assistant about a security breach — a door or window open, for example. Plus a video snapshot of the security issue can be e-mailed to you.

A favorite feature of video-monitored security systems is the capability to provide video verification of any alarm, thus dramatically reducing the number of false alarms — the bane of the industry and law enforcement everywhere.

"(The security company) is able to see exactly what happened when the alarm hit," Ostowicz said. "If the alarm is tripped by mistake, the security company can look and see that nobody is in the house and prevent law enforcement from going to your house for a false alarm."

While it's possible to have Internet monitoring without



CNS Photo courtesy of ADT Security Systems

Video monitoring and touch-screen control are among the advanced home security features offered by ADT Security Services, the nation's largest alarm company.

contracting with a professional alarm company, most security experts don't recommend it.

"Camera protection by itself is hit or miss. You can have cameras all over the place and if you're not there to constantly monitor it, you could miss something," said Steve Kaufer, a security consultant and alarm system designer in Palm Springs, Calif.

The latest high-tech alarm

systems use a response system that employs wireless cellular phone frequencies instead of land lines. This could be especially helpful if your phone lines are cut. The cellular system would kick in to make the call to the alarm monitoring service, sending them on their way.

Sometimes high-tech security simply means more convenience. Newer residential systems have done

away with cumbersome access codes. Instead, you simply need to hold up a key fob, a badge, or press a thumb or palm against an identification panel and the door unlocks for you.

"People want a security system that they can use, that fits their lifestyle," Ostowicz said. "It can't be too confusing or too intimidating because they'll end up not using it. And then they're back to square one."

Avoiding a break-in: What you can do to stay safe and secure

BY NANCY SUNDBROM
Special to the Record-Eagle

I think I live on the quietest street in a town that has always felt like one of the safest places in the Midwest. Like many locals, I didn't lock my house for years, and even went for long stretches where I had no key to my front door.

All that changed last September, when there was an attempted break-in at my home during the middle of the night, while my two children and I were sleep-

ing. The Traverse City police officers who came promptly were thorough and reassuring, and constructed a likely theory for what had happened. Because my house had been for sale with a sign out front, my car in the garage, no lights on or signs of inhabitants, plus the fact that we had been gone for a number of days over Labor Day weekend prior to the attempt, it was suspected that someone had "cased" the house, and believing it

was empty, attempted to enter it.

Per capita, Traverse City has a relatively low number of reported break-ins, and most of them take place when an intruder believes the house is empty and that there is easy access to the inside. Sergeant Fewless of the Grand Traverse Sheriff's Department says that far more actual thefts take place from parked cars that are in a home's driveway, and about 1 percent of those are done through entry into a locked vehicle, meaning the other 99 percent happen because cars are unlocked.

"Whether it is house or car, if it looks or actually is locked, or discouraging at all to get into, chances are almost none that a thief will get access," Fewless said. "Intruders don't want to make noise, attract attention, or generally have to work on entry in any way. In many cases, basic common sense approaches to security will be enough to keep your home and property undisturbed."

More good news is that the list of what to do is fairly simple and easy to implement. The first is to make sure your doors and windows are locked, even when taking a quick trip away, and especially when you will be gone for an extended period of time, from overnight to vacation. That means all doors, Fewless adds, stating that home owners may often lock a front door, but leave a side access door unlocked.

Shawn O'Brien, operations manager for Traverse

City's Ace Hardware, said that the store carries a wide range of door and window hardware for improved safety, at a cost between \$5 and \$50.

"We don't offer security systems, but we do have a lot of different options for simple, effective deterrents to an invasion," said O'Brien. "There are standard dead bolts and chain bolts, all the way to new window locks and door reinforcement pieces. All of them are fairly inexpensive, and the average homeowner can install them in just a few minutes."

Other basic security tips include not leaving items such as leaving ladders out, which could give someone easy access to your home;

being sure to plan ahead to take care of signs of vacancy, including papers, mail and unplowed driveways; having a dog that is sensitive to an unwanted presence; and timed lighting systems inside and motion sensor lights outside. If you are interested in more high-tech home security options, they are readily available both locally and on the Internet.

But nothing replaces common sense and communication, though, Fewless said. It is a good idea to discuss home safety with your family, to hopefully eliminate the possibility of a break-in, or to have a coordinated response should one occur.

Dialogue with trusted

neighbors is also valuable. Fewless recalled an incident where he was investigating a break-in complaint, and while canvassing the neighborhood, encountered a resident close by who had actually witnessed the crime and did identify the perpetrators, but had been reluctant to "get involved or appear to be a nosy neighbor."

"The bottom line is that if you make it harder to get into your car or home, you probably will not be a victim," he said. "If it's easier, your chances of just that happening will greatly increase."

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

Go with the flow

Tankless water heaters, also referred to as on-demand or instantaneous hot water heaters, often cost twice as much as standard water heaters. However, there's a payback in operating costs as they save water and energy and can operate 20 years or more. Standard storage tank heaters last 10-15 years.

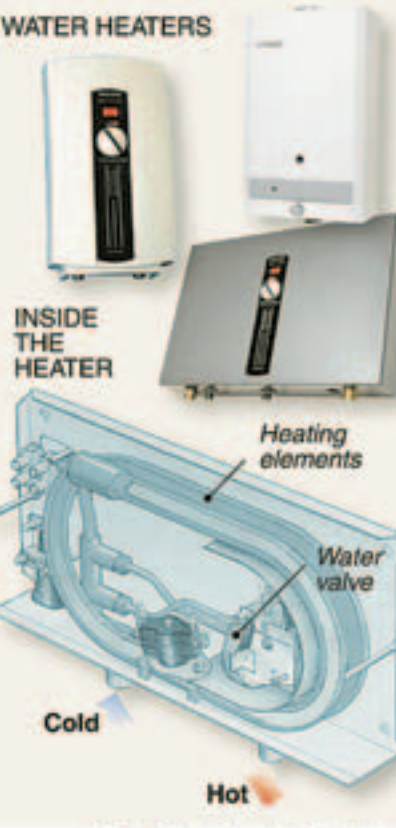
COMPARING TANKLESS WATER HEATERS

Electric tankless water heaters are almost 100 percent efficient (gas tankless water heaters are about 75 percent efficient).

On-demand water heaters that deliver 1-2 gallons per minute sell for about \$200; 3- to 5-gallon-per-minute units cost \$500-\$1,000.

Tankless water heaters, even the powerful whole-house models, take up about 2 cubic feet. They are often mounted on a wall or in a closet.

For information on models (both gas and electric) check: www.houseneeds.com/waterheatingproducts.



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