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Security Systems for the Home

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Technicians monitor home security systems at Bay Alarm Company. Photo provided

be activated when you leave the home and you need to take the maintenance of the system as one of the overall costs."

Answering basic home and lifestyle questions can help homeowners determine what kind of security system works for them. How large is the house? How many points of entry (doors and windows) does it have? Has it been pre-wired for a security system? Should the alarm system be a hard-wired or wireless? Who will install the alarm-the homeowner or an alarm technician?

A simple security system might have only door and window alarms and motion detectors. Some home alarm systems also monitor smoke alarms. Today's technology allows for video camera monitoring, remote access to a home's lights via smart phones and iPads and GSM radio communication between a homeowner and his or her alarm company. It's even possible to purchase an alarm system run through your cable television or telephone provider (Comcast or AT&T, for example).

Multi-media bells and whistles on home security can be "cool," says Eric Taylor of Bay Alarm Company, but people should not get caught up in what he calls "sexy technology."

"If we're talking security, let's focus on keeping the family safe." The premise of a burglar alarm, he says, is not to catch a thief once they're inside, but to keep thieves out of your home. Taylor says major security alarm manufacturers-Digital Monitoring Products, Honeywell, GE, and DSC, for example - all offer the same technology and basically the same equipment. GoControl and 2Gig are relatively new to the home security system business.

Those who have or want to install an alarm system should take steps to ensure their system does not trigger false alarms. "We respond to a lot of alarms," says Christensen. "Every time we go as if there is someone in the house, because once in a while an alarm means that someone is really there." Orinda Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings says his department answered 1,408 alarm calls in 2011, "the vast majority of which were false." Because of that some law enforcement agencies (although not those in Lamorinda) have even stopped answering burglar alarm calls.

The response to false alarms is an "ongoing problem," says Priebe, whose department responded to 207 false alarms in 2011. "Moraga Police Department will always respond to alarm calls," he says, even though his department "would rather be using police personnel to address other areas of concern."

To alarm or not to alarm; that is the question. Homes in affluent communities, Lamorinda included, can be magnets for thieves. An alarm system may be one way to prevent your house from becoming the next burglary statistic.

"I'm all for 'em," says Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe, who believes they deter break-ins. He says his home is alarmed, but cautions the systems can cause problems for the police department if they are not properly maintained. Priebe also suggests homeowners become familiar with an alarm company's reporting procedures before making a purchase. How the call is routed, and whether the call center is out of town can affect response time.

Orinda Detective Dan Jeffries says burglars who've been caught tell police they simply won't bother a home with a security system. He says homeowners should "announce to the world" they have an alarm system. Jeffries, who brought the concept for Orinda's burglary audit with him from a previous police department, adds homeowners should also keep their home exterior well lit at night, and trim vegetation away from entry points.

Lafayette's Police Chief Eric Christensen agrees, but cautions: "As with all security devices, the alarm needs to



Typical security system control panel



Door sensor



A sign in the front yard points out the security system

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