



# COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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## Burglar Alarms— One More Way to Protect Your Home

In our May/June 2005 issue we talked about the practical and inexpensive things you can do to prevent burglaries to your home. Some of the simpler measures include:

1. Solidly built doors secured with a good quality dead bolt lock with a 1” throw.
2. Windows that resist forced entry with auxiliary locking devices.
3. Sliding glass doors with Charlie Bars.
4. Landscaping that provides a neat appearance and allows observation of your house from the street.
5. Good lighting to provide easy observation of movement at night.
6. Active participation in a neighborhood Block Watch and Operation ID.

In addition to these measures, you might also want protection with an alarm system. You might have valuables that you think need additional protection. Your neighborhood may have had a series of burglaries recently.

**Advantages.** Advantages to having a burglar alarm are:

1. A sign outside of a house announcing that it is protected by a burglar alarm is usually sufficient to encourage potential burglars to move on to another house.
2. Burglar alarms give you added piece of mind that your home and loved ones are secure.
3. Most insurance companies will give you a discount on your homeowners coverage if you have an alarm.

**Local vs. Monitored.** When an alarm system detects an intruder, it announces the intruder either through a horn or siren (locally) and/or by signaling a central monitoring station (monitored).

A horn or siren will no doubt scare away an intruder but police won't be notified unless someone happens to hear the alarm and calls 911.

With a monitored system, you pay a monthly fee for the monitoring service. When the service receives a signal that an intruder is in your house, they call your home phone number to verify that there is a problem. If they cannot determine that your home is secure they call the local 911 agency who dispatches the police.



## Burglar Alarm Contractors— What to Ask

- *Is the firm established, with a history of performance and service?*
- *Does the alarm company have insurance to cover the cost of any damage to your property caused by the company during installation?*
- *Are the company and installers properly licensed and bonded? Is anything sub-contracted (installation, service, monitoring)?*
- *Is the central monitoring station U/L Approved? Where is it located?*
- *Is the system equipped with a battery backup? Is the battery rechargeable?*
- *Does the company offer a written guarantee? What is guaranteed and for how long? Are parts and labor covered?*

## Burglar Alarms— *Be Sure to Shop Around*

When you have decided that you need a burglar alarm take your time. Many people get an alarm as a reflex after being victimized from a burglary. This can lead to problems with equipment or with the contractor. Most police departments and even burglar and fire alarm associations recommend that you should shop around before deciding on a company to install your burglar alarm.

Your use of the burglar alarm should be second nature, like locking your doors. The system should be easy for you to use. Look for simplicity over complicated features. After all, a feature filled alarm system is no good if you find it is too hard to use.

Think about what it is that you want to protect in your home. Consider having a fire alarm installed along with your burglar alarm. Also, consider special situations such as pets. This will influence the setup of your alarm system and its features.

When you start looking for an alarm company get references from friends, family, insurance agent, and neighbors who have alarm systems. Contact five or more companies for bids.

Check to see if the companies are licensed in the State of Washington. You can look them up at:

- The Department of Licensing- <https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/profquery/>

- The Department of Labor and Industries- <http://www.lni.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Contractors/HireCon/>

When contacting the companies, ask if they are members of the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association ([www.alarm.org](http://www.alarm.org) and [www.washingtonbfaa.org](http://www.washingtonbfaa.org) for the state affiliate). Ask if they do pre-employment screening of their employees.

Have the companies survey your home and give you a written proposal of their recommendations and the cost of components, installation, service, etc.

Ask each company for the names and phone numbers of three customers. Ask each customer for their experience with this company, where possible.

Once you have decided on a contractor and installation is complete, be sure to receive a complete briefing of how to use your new alarm system. This would be a good time to have your whole family present. Be sure you completely understand how it works. Also, be sure to receive a manual that you can review on your own.

Then use your new alarm system. Remember, not using your alarm system is like not locking your doors. It does not do you any good if you do not use it.



## Burglar Alarms— How They Work

A basic household alarm system consists of a control panel, sensors, and an method of annunciation (a method to alert people of an intruder).

The control panel is the brains of your alarm system. The sensors are connected to the control panel. If a sensor detects an intrusion, it signals the control panel which in turn sounds a horn or siren and/or dials the central monitoring station. At the control panel you turn the system on or off, often with a pass code. Be sure the control panel is located at a convenient place where you usually enter or leave your house.

The sensors can detect an intrusion in a variety of ways. For a basic system, your doors to the outside, such as front door, sliding glass door and door to the garage will have contact sensors. When the system is on, if the door opens, then the sensor sends a signal to the control panel.

Another sensor that you might have in a basic system would be a motion detector. Using either Ultrasonic waves or microwaves, a motion detector sends a signal to the control panel when a body is detected within the field of view of the device. Pets can cause a false alarm if detected by a motion detector.

With the doors covered to your house, you might want additional sensors on your windows. Sometimes burglars enter through windows.

## False Alarms— A Drain On Your Police Resources

Of the alarm calls that the Sheriff's Office responds to, 95% are usually false alarms. Each alarm call involves at least 2 deputies and 911 dispatch staff.

The Sheriff's Office encourages you to do what you can to prevent your alarm system from sending false alarms:

- Securely close and lock all doors and windows.
- Know your exit and entry time after your alarm is set.
- Be sure that any person who has access to your property knows how to properly operate your alarm. This includes family, employees, cleaning crews, neighbors, etc.
- If you accidentally set off your alarm system, DON'T PANIC, you have time to enter your pass code to disarm and reset your alarm system.
- If you accidentally set off your alarm system, DO NOT leave your home or business until you have talked to your alarm company/monitoring station.
- If you are having excessive false alarms, contact your alarm company and ask them to inspect your alarm system and make recommendations to reduce the number of false alarms.
- Test your alarm periodically to ensure that it is functioning properly. Be sure to notify your alarm company before you begin testing your system.

### More Tips to Prevent False Alarms

- *Set your motion detectors high enough that your pet cannot set them off.*
- *Keep your motion sensors clean and clear of cobwebs. Be sure to remove all cobwebs and spiders that you can see from the corners of the ceilings and walls.*
- *Be sure your doors and windows have tight fittings to prevent drafts and excess air movement.*
- *Tie up loose balloons to prevent them from floating freely in your home or business.*
- *Secure doors and windows thoroughly before setting the alarm and leaving your home or business.*
- *Replace the backup batteries at least once a year before they become weak. Follow your alarm company's recommendations for battery replacement.*



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### Tip Lines:

- Phone:  
425-388-3845
- Sheriff's Website:  
[www.co.snohomish.wa.us/  
/SheriffRpts/  
AnonymousTips/  
default.htm](http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/SheriffRpts/AnonymousTips/default.htm)

## Burglar Alarms– Where to Get More Information

For more information on alarms, go to:

The Sheriff's Office web site at:

[http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/  
Departments/Sheriff/Information/  
False\\_Alarm/](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Sheriff/Information/False_Alarm/)

The National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association web site:

<http://www.alarms.org/>

The Washington Burglar and Fire Alarm Association web site:

<http://www.washingtonbfaa.org/>

False Alarm Reduction Association web site:

<http://www.faraonline.org/>

Texas Burglar and Fire Alarm Association web site:

[http://www.tbfaa.org/html/  
burglar\\_alarm\\_systems.asp](http://www.tbfaa.org/html/burglar_alarm_systems.asp)

How Stuff Works– How Burglar Alarms Work:

[http://home.howstuffworks.com/  
burglar-alarm.htm](http://home.howstuffworks.com/burglar-alarm.htm)