

Avoid 'summer slamming' burglar alarm scams

May 10, 2011 4:48 PM



Summer's coming, with its corresponding rise in burglaries as people leave more windows open and get out of the house. For some neighborhoods, the warmer months also mean "summer slamming," which refers to alarm companies that hit the streets to target homeowners with alarms.

Often college students in summer jobs, they travel in teams and go door-to-door to woo alarm users away from their existing alarm companies—and to new systems with extremely low monthly monitoring fees. At first blush, this might seem like a win-win for the homeowner who'd like to pay less for the same protection. But what often results is faulty or poorly installed replacement equipment, along with monitoring fees that don't stay low for long.

Some in the industry frown upon the practice. "This stuff drives us crazy, because it creates a bad image for legitimate door-to-door sales people in the alarm industry," said Jamie Haenggi, chief marketing officer for Protection 1. "Homeowners should be wary of inviting people into their homes, showing their vulnerable security points. Ensuring that proper background checks are conducted and reps are trained properly is something that people should look into when choosing a company."

Here are some pointers for anyone considering a new or replacement alarm system:

Consider the long term. In every step, from initial sale to long-term monitoring, you have the right to know up front whether subcontractors will be involved—and whether your contract, after you sign it, might be sold to a company you didn't get to research.

Learn your options. Whichever company you're looking into, be sure it offers all the extras you might want. Major alarm companies such as ADT, Monitronics, and Protection 1 have add-ins to the contract that allow remote monitoring of your home using cameras, computers and, more recently, smartphone apps. Other options include a panic-button device you can use to summon help during, say, a home invasion even if the homeowner, under gunpoint, is forced to disarm the alarm.

Keep up with alarm training. Dissatisfaction with your existing alarm company might stem from false alarms, most often attributable to user error. Any competent installer should train family members in how to use the system, including how to stop an alarm signal should you accidentally trip it. But contact your company if you still need this training or have added adults to your household.

Know an alarm's limitations. Alarm-service contracts often require you to run a test monthly. Even if everything is working, however, smart burglars know how long they likely have till responders show up. "There can be 10 to 20 minutes between the time of the actual activation and when we're notified," says Major Kurt Philipps, supervisor of the Memphis Police Department's burglary bureau, "but if someone's being shot or robbed, you're going to have to take a back seat." That's why noisy as well as silent alarms provide additional protection.

Other ways to stay safe. For more on home security read our special report [Your Security](#), which includes new [Ratings of door locks](#).

—Ed Perratore