Choosing the Best Home Security System

By Tim Brugger

The right home security system provides peace of mind, protects your property, and increases your personal safety. Some systems sound an alarm to alert you of a problem, while others communicate with a company that can contact local police and fire departments. But which type is best for you? The following factors will help you decide:

• **The right features.** Every home should have basic smoke and carbon monoxide detectors that are properly tested and in good working order. Burglar alarms can be a bit more complicated, but you can still buy your own motion detector from your local hardware store, or shop online at specialty outlets for more sophisticated alarms.

• **The right price.** Do-it-yourself security systems can range from $10 to several hundred dollars. Professionally monitored systems, however, come with a monthly fee in addition to the initial price tag. Costs for these systems vary: You can find inexpensive alarm components and pay $50 or less for a monthly monitoring contract. Conversely, high-end systems can cost several thousand dollars, not including the monthly fees. Each fire or carbon monoxide detector usually costs an additional $150 to $225.

• **The right company.** If you have a professional company install your security system, remember to ask if its employees are trained by a certification company, like ESA's National Training School. You should also check consumer claims and the company's work history through organizations like the Better Business Bureau.

• **The right time.** Once you've made your decision, book an installation appointment. Make sure the whole family is present when the company representative explains the system—everyone should learn how it works.

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