

More and more people today are turning to security systems to protect their homes and businesses. From a law enforcement perspective, security systems are a great crime prevention tool and helpful in gathering evidence should a crime occur. Properly installed security systems can alert law enforcement to a crime in progress and provide the evidence needed to solve a crime. Whether you already have a security system or are considering the purchase of one, we offer the following suggestions to help maximize the benefit of any security system you may utilize.

First, one caveat about security systems. As helpful as security systems are as a crime prevention strategy, they have their limitations. Those who have security systems would be wise to employ other crime prevention strategies to get the most out of their investment. Securing homes, vehicles, and outbuildings is still a crucial step for any home or business. Taking active measures to keep areas well-lit and visible to passers-by is equally important. Security system owners would also be wise to record the serial numbers of valuables and participate in neighborhood watch programs to bolster the value of their security system.

From a law enforcement perspective, security systems are most valuable when they provide timely warning of a problem and when they preserve high-quality video evidence of a crime. When exploring a security system, buyers should consider how the system will be monitored and how law enforcement will be notified of an alarm. Generally, consumers must choose between a system that is primarily monitored by a company or one that provides alerts directly to the consumer via internet-connected devices. Even in the best of circumstances, monitored systems will introduce some delay into the notification process. Alarms must transmit to the monitoring center and be received and processed by monitoring staff before a call is made to law enforcement. The length of delay this process introduces will vary by company and is something a buyer should ask about before purchasing this service. Monitored systems do ensure someone is always available to receive and respond to alarms. Systems that generate direct-to-consumer notifications will be faster at alerting the consumer of an alarm. However, buyers should consider how confident they are their chosen device will always have sufficient connectivity to receive alarms generated by their security system. Consumers should also consider how their availability to respond to alarms might affect a delay in notification to law enforcement. If your alarm is tripped while you are away from your device or unable to check the device, it could be quite some time before anyone responds to the alarm.

Many modern security systems include surveillance cameras. Quality surveillance cameras that are properly positioned can provide key pieces of evidence law enforcement will need to solve a crime. Our advice is to purchase the best resolution camera your budget will allow. Even though crime dramas on television regularly portray law enforcement “enhancing” a blurry and pixilated image into a high-quality view of a suspect with a few quick keystrokes, this is pure Hollywood fantasy. If you start with a blurry and pixilated image from a low-quality camera, you will end with a blurry and pixilated image. A well-positioned high-resolution camera will allow law enforcement to obtain license plate numbers, observe unique features of suspect vehicles, and gather detailed images of suspects. Positioning a camera at the front door to a residence makes good sense for normal daily activity at a home or business, but criminals may not necessarily use this normal route. Criminals tend to favor doors or windows on the back or side of a building or entering an attached garage. Surveillance cameras that provide a high-quality view of a driveway for vehicles and alternative entry points for suspects can yield valuable footage should a criminal come to your home. When purchasing a security system, ensure your system records the images it captures. Having images of a suspect or vehicle to share in traditional

media and social media increases the likelihood law enforcement will receive the information we need to solve a crime.

Finally, take care to keep your system in top working order. At 289 calls, alarm calls were one of the most frequently received calls in our dispatch center in 2020. The vast majority of these calls end up being false alarms. Some of these false alarms come from systems in need of maintenance while others are accidental trips by homeowners or employees. Keeping your security system in good working order and ensuring those coming and going from the alarmed premises know how to avoid or disable the alarm will save our office from expending resources needlessly.

Help law enforcement help you by ensuring your security system provides timely and correct notification of alarms and captures high quality images in and around your property. For more crime prevention and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.