

Security systems are a great defense against crime, particularly against property crime. In football, a great defense is built upon having the right players in the right place doing the right things. Home security systems are very similar. For an effective defense, systems must have good components working together to deter criminals.

The landscape of alarm options has changed drastically with the proliferation of cell phones and internet-connected devices. Today's home and business owners have a wide range of options from professionally installed and monitored systems that do the work of contacting emergency services to DIY cameras and alarms that alert system users on their mobile devices. Effective alarm systems deter crime by making timely notifications of alarm trips to someone who can act on them, capturing quality photos or videos of suspects, and operating at peak performance.

An alarm that goes unnoticed or unrecognized is of little value. Companies providing monitored alarm system services employ rooms full of people watching for alarm trips and summoning emergency response. These monitored alarm systems are good solutions for properties that have a large footprint or complex alarm configuration. Monitored systems may also be the right choice for a property owner who would rather pay a monthly fee to outsource the monitoring to someone else. Self-monitored systems eliminate the monthly monitoring costs but place the burden of watching the alarm on the owner. Owners must ensure they have enough contacts willing to monitor alarm trips and respond appropriately. The availability of Wi-Fi or cellular coverage must be considered both at the location of the alarm install and for the people monitoring for alarm trips. The decision of monitored vs. DIY system is one that must be made prior to purchase. In football, the best defenses know when to play the run or the pass. In choosing an alarm system, home and business owners should weigh which system would best fit their situation before calling their play.

In 30 years of law enforcement, I've seen a lot of fuzzy surveillance system photos and video footage. Both law enforcement and property owners feel the frustration of being able to watch footage of their property being stolen by a thief whose image is just too out of focus or too far from the camera to provide a useful image. Superstar linebackers won't last long in the game if they are consistently in the wrong spot on the field. Good alarm and surveillance systems must have cameras and sensors placed strategically and aimed well. Whether installed by a professional or a property owner, cameras and sensors need to be placed where criminals will most likely pass or enter. A camera that overlooks a driveway should be positioned to capture an image of an approaching license plate. A camera that controls an entry point, like a doorway or window, should be set up to capture a clear view of a person's face as they pass by. Motion detectors and other sensors should be placed in areas where a suspect would have to pass or would be likely to pass. Once inside, most residential burglars will target bedrooms while most commercial burglars will target office areas as these areas tend to be where valuables are stored. Position your alarm components to capture suspects in these high traffic areas. Once you have the system configured, test the system to ensure you're getting alarms at the proper time and quality images. It is impressive how well a video or image of a suspect will travel across social media platforms and generate good leads for investigators to follow.

Your alarm system and the system users need to operate at top performance. Great defenses make corrections to their plays and practice performing them the right way over and over to stay competitive. Alarm owners need to stay a step ahead of criminals with this same strategy. People coming and going from the property regularly need to know how to correctly arm and disarm the alarm system.

System owners need to stay on top of malfunctions and false alarms. These systems are complex, and many variables determine the system's effectiveness. It may take time and adjustments to ensure the system is working to detect intrusions while limiting false alarms. No alarm owner wishes for their alarm to be the alarm who cried wolf. False alarms unnecessarily take up time of monitoring companies, alarm owners, and law enforcement. In 2024, 43 of the 250 alarms our office received were false alarms. An additional 82 of these were alarm trips that were accidental, malfunctions, or cancelled by keyholders. Maintaining alarm systems and troubleshooting problems is essential to prevent false alarms. Besides being bothersome, failing to maintain an alarm can become costly. To encourage alarm owners to be vigilant concerning their alarm systems, our office charges a \$50 fee to owners who have 4 or more false alarms in a year. Take the time to troubleshoot false alarm trips and be persistent with your alarm vendor in your expectation that their system performs as intended.

Alarm systems are a great defense against crime. Like any defense, the players need to be prepared and perform well to be effective. Be smart in selecting your alarm system, be strategic in deploying the cameras and sensors, and be disciplined in expecting top performance. These steps will keep your alarm ready for action at game time. For more crime prevention information 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.