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Impressive Protection

"In Toronto alone, the cost of false alarm response to taxpayers is estimated at more than \$12 million per year," notes Wilson. That is a lot of money that could be used to provide the police services that are truly needed to further enhance protection efforts within a community.

Wilson says businesses often have high false alarm rates — for a number of different reasons. And so, although impact-activated audio is a very labour-intensive propo-

sition for the company that operates it, and a more expensive one for those companies and individuals that opt to implement it, it can provide the added protection needed to secure both people and valuable inventory.

"Criminals have been known to tape up door contacts and they can also disengage motion detectors with paint," notes Mark Healy, a Canadian Tire dealer in Alliston, Ontario. "With our previous security system, we had some problems, including an inside job that I am convinced could not have succeeded with the audio verification system we now have in place."

Healy says that since putting a Sonitrol system in his store close to three years ago, he has not had a single break-in or other theft attempt at his store. And, if an attempt were made, he is confident in the knowledge that the police would respond quickly because it would be a verified alarm.

Of course, Wilson himself is the first to admit that audio verification and silent monitoring is not the security system for everyone.

"We're very much a niche player," he contends. "We protect those people who really need to be protected. We do residential installations from time to time, but the reality is that if a person doesn't have an art collection, a gun collection or some other type of priceless collection, they don't really need an alarm."

For those who do — and for businesses that undoubtedly need secured locations — Wilson is also quick to point out that the installation of a security system is not the only step that needs to be taken. It is simply one part of a much larger security picture.

"Organizations and individuals also need to use complementary security strategies that make their offices and residences risky and unappealing to criminals. That way, they won't become targets in the first place." ❁

Stacey Hunt is editor of Canadian Security.

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and Westinghouse — comprise and what makes it so popular among its clients?

For starters, the audio and video verification technology boasts an alarm accuracy rate of about 97 per cent and has the ability to cover an entire building. And the system is set up in such a way that it effectively distinguishes between the regular sounds of business and the sounds associated with attempted and successful break-ins.

"When we install our system," explains Joe Wilson, vice-president of Sonitrol's Canadian operations, "we put enough audio sensors in to detect noises within the building and along the building shell. The system is alerted to all of the activity in the area, and it only takes about 3.2 seconds to trip to one of our 160 monitoring stations."

"As well, we use a computer calibrator to program each system with the ambient sounds of the building so that it listens for noises that shouldn't be there. Each sensor picks up sounds 30 feet behind it, 60 feet in front of it and 40 feet side to side — a reality that allows us to easily cover 100 per cent of a building."

In fact, the system can detect unauthorized entry through both conventional and unconventional access points, including walls, vents, ceilings, doors and windows. Should an employee attempt to stay after-hours to rob a business, the system will pick up those suspicious sounds, too, and alert the monitoring centre in order to minimize and even eliminate severe loss or damage.

Monitoring staff also receive the training needed to alert them to the breaches. Police are notified once an alarm has been verified and monitoring personnel continue to listen in and gain valuable information — including the names of the criminals, their intentions and the weapons they may be carrying — and pass the information to police en route.

Copies of images captured on video at the scene can also be sent to the police station via fax by the time officers arrive back at the police station with or without a suspect (although the apprehension rate is very high with approximately 145,000 criminals being caught since 1977). This further facilitates the investigation process and helps bring the incident full circle to a speedy close.

Believe It or Not

Here is a quick look at some of the crimes that have been prevented thanks to audio verification with silent monitoring.

An inside job. Two employees at a large automotive distribution centre decided to stay after-hours. The men went into an internal washroom, lifted the ceiling tiles and sat on the wall joists until everyone else had left the building. When they came out, the bathroom door squeaked as it opened and the audio verification system was tripped. An operator at the monitoring station heard the two men talking and knew exactly where the sound was coming from in the 575,000 square foot facility.

The operator notified the police and told them that it was not an actual break-in because the roof, walls, windows, doors, vents and the like had not actually been tampered with. In the meantime, the workers and would-be thieves had moved on to the automotive parts counter and had started to rummage through the tills. Their actions, conversation and location were being passed along to the police the entire time.

When the police arrived on the scene, the men tried to hide but, based on sound, were easily located by the station operator. One of the perpetrators was apprehended and the police then shocked him by asking him the whereabouts of his partner by name (based on the conversation overheard earlier).

Necessary backup. An electronics warehouse was broken into and the police were notified. Two cars were sent in to respond and as they arrived the operator heard one robber tell the other that there were only two police cars and instruct him to use the Uzi. The operator sent the message to police and the two cars pulled back and waited for the Tactical Response Unit to arrive.

Gunfire ensued and the entire incident — from five seconds prior to the start of the break-in — was recorded. Monitoring station representatives were later called into the investigation.

Computer appeal. Some buildings owned and leased by Rosseau Real Estate were regularly being broken into. Over time, the losses became too much to bear and

the company installed an audio verification system with silent monitoring.

Afterwards, CML Limited — a publicity company with offices in one of the buildings — fell victim to two attempted robberies just two weeks apart. Both thefts were averted, one with the police responding in four minutes and catching one of the thieves. The total loss to the company was one broken window.

Ace in the hole. An attempted theft at a golf retailer fell apart after the crooks were picked up by the audio verification system in place there. The perpetrators had broken into an adjacent store through its rooftop. That store's alarm was not triggered by their entry, but the golf retailer's was — as soon as the criminals went through its drop ceiling.

Police were dispatched but intended to leave because no visible sign of entry was observed. The station operator told them to stay, telling them that the perpetrators were still inside. The police entered the building with dogs and caught the criminals red-handed.

False alarm debates can be quite controversial, and the arguments can become heated. Part of the problem cited by the policing community is the fact that upwards of 98 per cent of all alarm calls are false. One of the opposing arguments from the alarm industry is that an extremely large number of alarm systems that are protecting businesses and residences never go off at all.

But despite the areas of remaining contention, everyone affected does seem to agree on one thing. Police and the alarm community need to work together to minimize the number of false alarms and protect facilities, property and individuals from the impact of criminal activities.

There are some companies and technologies available to improve the situation — to minimize false alarms and ensure quick and appropriate response. One of them is an audio verification system that not only makes it easier to verify an alarm but can even help police with the apprehension of thieves.

Sound Offerings

"The key to audio verification is that it enables operators to listen in when criminals are starting their attempt to get into a facility," explains John Crusoe, manager of planning and risk management for Brewers Retail Inc. (BRI). "There is immediate notification to monitoring personnel at the first point of contact."

For a company with the sales volume that BRI has across its 430 retail locations — and the losses it had before installing its audio verification system as part of its comprehensive security program — the benefits are well worth the extra dollars, especially when the return on investment is taken into account. Within the first two years, the company witnessed a 54-per-cent drop in the number of burglaries in its stores, as well as a 79-per-cent reduction in dollar losses. From 1994 to this year, the total decrease has reached 76 and 90 per cent, respectively.

The first 100 systems were installed at Brewers Retail locations in 1994. About 100 systems were put in each year thereafter until all of the BRI facilities were protected with audio verification and silent monitoring.

"Overall, we've witnessed a reduction in the frequency of incidents, a reduction in property damage losses, and a reduction in our insurance premiums," states Crusoe. "As well, our staff members are not being called in the middle of the night to go to a store to secure the premise. That alone has a significant impact on employee morale."

"Police recognize the validity of a call from a Sonitrol monitoring station. In fact, we've had bandits with crowbars trying to break into our stores and the police have caught them at that point thanks to the system we have in place."

System Synopsis

So just what does the system being used by Brewers Retail and other large corporate end users — including other Canadian clients such as Costco, Home Depot, Nissan, Toshiba