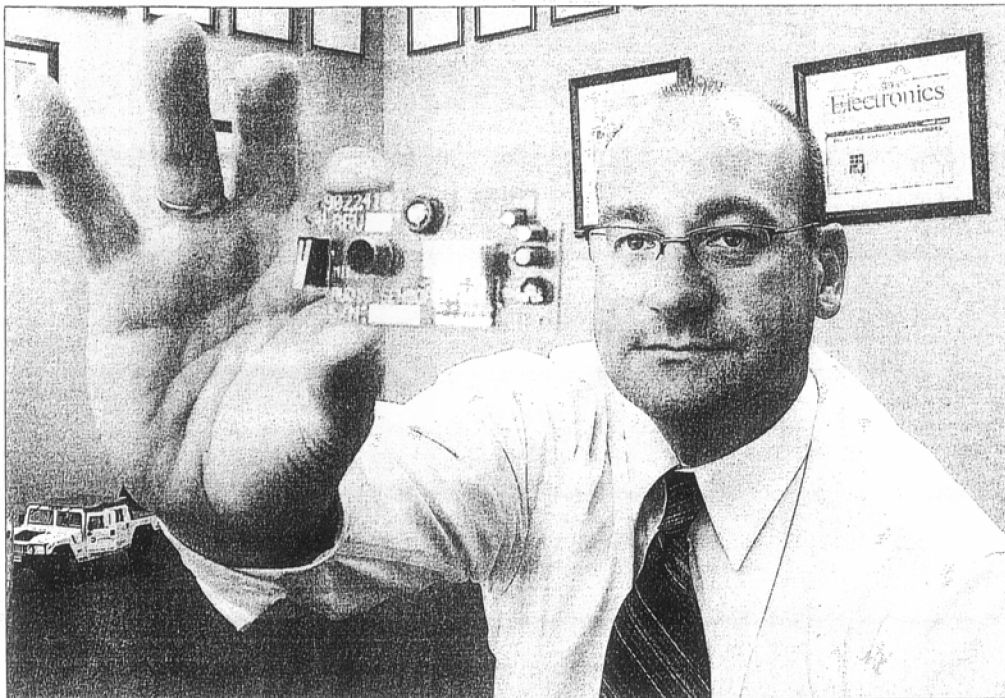


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I Surrey

FROM THE SOUTH FRASER TO THE PEACE ARCH



**■ POLICE / Crime up 16 per cent in first quarter over same time last year**

## Crime rate climbs with population

**I HEARD THAT ...**

Sonitrol president and CEO Joe Wilson holds up one of the listening devices his security company uses to catch burglars in the act. The sensors allow monitors to hear unusual noises so they can alert police and track a thief's location inside their clients' buildings.

■ PHOTO / Ted Colley

**■ SECURITY / Surrey-based company has different approach to nabbing thieves**

# Eavesdropping on burglars

If you're a burglar ripping off a business protected by Sonitrol, somebody's listening and chances are good you're going to be caught.

Ted COLLEY  
 Staff Reporter

The Surrey-based security company has operations throughout North America and specializes in protecting businesses against burglaries by installing small listening devices in their buildings that can detect the unmistakable sounds of a break-in. Staff in Sonitrol's monitoring station can listen in and decide if police should be dispatched to the scene.

If audio sensors are installed throughout the business, they can be used to track a thief's activities and his location inside the building — useful information for police when they arrive.

Sonitrol president and CEO Joe Wilson said his company's equipment offers much better protection against the professional crooks responsible for most of the losses in commercial break-ins than conventional systems.

"Four per cent of the criminals commit 95 per cent of the crime. They're not East Hastings scumbags, they're smart," Wilson said during an interview at his South Surrey office.

"Conventional alarm systems aren't going to stop them."

The proliferation of alarm systems in businesses and homes has resulted in a flood of false

alarm calls to police. They've become so common that many cities, including Surrey, have adopted bylaws setting out fines and limiting the number of times police will respond to addresses with a history of false alarms.

Thieves know how to work that to their advantage, too.

"They'll trigger false alarms. After four times, the cops fine you \$75 and they won't come anymore."

Once an establishment is on the false-alarm list, thieves can come back, break in and clean out the place without having to worry about the police showing up in the middle of the job.

Some alarm systems use loud sirens to attract attention when they're set off. Those, Wilson said, are worse than useless.

"Those are unmonitored. They're saying, 'Come and break in.' They don't stop the smart thieves because either they don't set them off or, if they get a siren, they just cut the wire," he said.

Wilson said police like his company's system because his operators can give them solid information about what's going on inside a building and where, and because the audio recordings can be used as evidence.

Sonitrol also has infrared video systems that can be used to keep an eye on premises in the dark. Just like the audio sensors, Sonitrol person-

nel can watch suspicious activity recorded by the cameras in real time and report what they see directly to police.

"We can even shoot it out to the police cars so they can watch it on their computer monitors."

Wilson offered a thick stack of testimonial letters from satisfied clients to back up his claims. The list includes several Canadian Tire stores, the Abbotsford parole office of Corrections Canada and the B.C. Crime Prevention Association whose New Westminster offices are protected by Sonitrol.

Wilson himself is a former customer who became so impressed by Sonitrol's system, he bought the company.

Wilson used to be head of security for Molson and Labatt breweries' retail division. The division was losing \$1.4 million annually, mainly through armed robberies of its Ontario beer stores.

Persuaded to give Sonitrol a chance to help, Wilson agreed to a one-year trial run and the results, he said, were remarkable.

"Our losses dropped in one year from \$1.4 million to \$37,000. I got a nice bonus from the company and used the money to buy Sonitrol."

Now based in Surrey, the company has operations in B.C., Alberta and Ontario and in the U.S.

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**■ Talk security over breakfast**

Sonitrol is sponsoring the next breakfast meeting of the Port Kells Business Focus Group Wednesday, Aug. 11, at 8 a.m. at the New Millennium Restaurant. Guests can meet and talk with Fraser McRae, assistant officer in charge of Surrey RCMP. Cost is \$10 per person. Call the Surrey Chamber of Commerce at 604-581-7130 to register.