

# CONTRACTOR ADVANTAGE

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## How Secure Is Your Job Site?

BY PAUL BARKER

The old "Night Watchman" way of protecting construction sites is not deterring vandals, thieves and arsonists, says security expert Joe Wilson. The same applies to guard dogs, which can cost upwards of \$1,500 a month and provide mixed results at best, a conventional CCTV feed that produces grainy, dark and unrecognizable images of the perpetrator of a crime after the fact, and conventional monitoring systems, which he claims have an acutely high (upwards of 98%) false alarm rate.

"The economic downturn has presented the construction industry with ample struggles and challenges, some more obvious than others," says Wilson, president of Sonitrol Security of Surrey, B.C. "Crime targeting construction sites (both active and vacant) has increased and the security challenges posed by the allure of raw materials and supplies on sites call for stronger protective measures."

An added concern is that only 4% of the criminal element residing within a community end up committing 95% of the crime. There is a reason for that, adds Wilson, who prior to joining Sonitrol was Director of Security for Brewer's Retail (BRI) in Ontario. First, it is their job and secondly, they know how to beat all of the sensors and are rarely going to trip a conventional alarm system.

They are also wily, particularly when it comes to break-ins on construction sites. "If we profiled the thief, we would find many come from the contractor ranks," he points out. "It is a tough thing to say, but it is true. They have to be agile and in shape and know how to open things and get over fences. The general labourer, if you will, fits that profile quite nicely."



Joe Wilson, above, president of Sonitrol Security: Crime targeting construction sites is on the rise. Below: SonaVision infrared cameras detect criminals the second they enter a site.



Wilson's involvement with Sonitrol began when he was introduced to the company's product offerings called Verified Only Dispatch, while at Brewer's Retail (now known as The Beer Store) by members of the Metro Toronto Police hold-up squad.

The firm's security package is made up of SonaVision infrared video cameras with motion sensors and the sound-based Sonitrol alarm, which "pushes" video directly to a monitoring person immediately. The video and audio is also fed live to the nearest police cruiser, which in turn provides officers with clear footage of where and how the crime is taking place be it on a construction site, a retail outlet or warehouse, before they arrive on the scene.

With 460 retail outlets, 20 distribution facilities, 20 regional offices and a corporate head office, BRI frequently had armed robberies and break-ins. After installing verified security in 100 locations, break-in losses dropped from \$1.4 million to \$36,000, while armed robberies dropped from five per week to zero.

"We install an audio sensor that is really a bug that listens for non-ambient sound," says Wilson. "When the system is armed, we are listening to hear people spin the dead bolt, pop up the hinges, peel the door, or come through the roof or the wall before they gain entry. The police are then notified as a Priority One dispatch, which means response time is around three minutes max."

The break-ins themselves on a construction site, more times than not, occur when a home is nearing completion. The criminal or criminals are looking for the sub-zero fridge, the Viking range, the new high-efficiency furnace, the lumber, the cop-

per piping, wiring and if they are a member of the trades, says Wilson, any other equipment they might be able to use on the job they are doing.

"These guys are also smart enough to even do it during broad daylight. As an example, if a site is closed on a Sunday, that is when you might see the guy show up in a truck and wearing a white helmet and vest with reflective tape on it. He then walks casually around the site and takes a generator. He might even wave to people as he is leaving. At the end of the day, everyone ignores him because who would be so blatant?"

"They show up during the day and shop. On the construction site, they pretend to be a building inspector or lumber supply sales rep," and are searching out the area.

The company's parent firm, which operates in 170 locations throughout Canada and the U.S., estimates that since 1977 Sonitrol equipment has helped police apprehend over 160,000 criminals. Its customers include Canadian Tire, Adidas, Costco, Public Works Canada, Ryder Logistics and the Keg Restaurant chain and as far as cost is concerned, that depends on the location.

A home under construction, for example, could be outfitted with a hardwire system for around \$3,000 plus monitoring fees in which security devices can be placed at the front and back of the structure and then disarmed each morning when contractors arrive for work.

The contractor can then either move it to the next project or if he wants, sell it to the homeowner.

Further information is available at [www.sonitrol-canada.com](http://www.sonitrol-canada.com).