

Building site security

Protecting your construction site with Sonavision

By Jeff Smith

Recently, at the grand opening of a new custom built home, the owner told me about all his new appliances being stolen. On the day the appliances were delivered, thieves arrived during the night and removed them; the loss was around \$50,000. I asked about his alarm system. "It didn't even detect the break-in!" he replied.

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Wow, we spend all this money building a new home, but how do we protect it? I decided to write an article about security for homes, and asked friends of mine who are cops if they could help. "Oh, you have to call Joe Wilson at Sonitrol," I was told, "if you want to know how criminals operate and how best to protect a home."

I told Joe the story about the appliances being stolen. He advised that these types of thefts are a common occurrence and that he would love to share with me how to protect a building site

properly. I said I was only interested in how to protect a house, but he corrected me and said, "No, you want to know how to protect a building site while the home is being built."

Security of a new residence begins with protecting the construction site. Criminal activity at construction sites starts as soon as the site office trailer arrives or foundation materials are delivered. Opportunistic criminals will arrive at night to steal materials, tools, excavators, and even the construction trailer. "In large projects, the insurance company will request guards to watch over the site," said Joe. "The problem with guards is they are expensive, have a tendency to fall asleep, and in some cases have been the folks stealing the goods."

Setting up a rented construction fence is the first security measure. On the West Coast, Joe loves "Super Save Fence Rentals"; they rent out the nice, big, clean, blue fence with a gate that gets locked at night by the general contractor. The fence won't stop criminal activity, but it does create a no trespassing zone, keeps the kids out so they don't get hurt playing on site, and allows the contractor to remotely monitor the construction site with video surveillance.

I caught up with Joe. In a James Bond-like manner,

he pulled out his Pocket PC to show me a nighttime video clip from a residential construction site Sonitrol was protecting. We watched two guys arrive

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in a pick-up truck, cut the lock on the fence, and load 2' x 12' boards into the bed of the truck. Within four minutes, the police arrived. This video was unbelievably clear, even though it was recorded at 2:37 in the morning.

Joe then explained how a construction site is protected properly. "What you just saw was a product called Sonavision, which is our remotely monitored video system," he said. "Infrared cameras that view in colour when light is present, and in black and white when light is not present, are positioned around the home to watch the perimeter."

Sonavision is designed to detect heat and movement within the camera's view. Once detected, the live video is sent to one of Sonitrol's 150 monitoring stations where their personnel view the construction

site. If a vehicle or human is seen, the police are dispatched—simple and much cheaper than hiring a guard.

Joe clarified that the real value with Sonavision is operational. The homeowner and architect can dial in and view the site at any time to check on the progress. The contractor can also dial in and check in on the crew or the status of delivery orders, etc.

What happens once construction has been completed? In most cases the homeowner will keep the Sonavision system so they can continue to protect their property or record events that happen around the home. Otherwise, the Sonavision system is removed. Although Sonitrol rents and sells its equipment, in many cases the contractor who purchased Sonavision will move it from one construction site to another. The contractor is responsible for replacing stolen materials, repairing the damage to a facility, and covering the costs of down time, as when a framing crew waits for new 2' x 12' boards to be delivered.

Okay, I then asked Joe about protecting the home properly. "We'll save that for the next issue," he said, as he ran out the door to help the police with their Bait Car Program. Imagine, live video of a bait car being stolen recorded directly into the police cruiser; this Sonitrol stuff is cool!

