



## *Home Alarm System Recommendations*

In light of the home-related crimes that we continue to experience in the Montclair/Oakland Hills area, the MSIC recommends that a home alarm system be properly designed, installed and used. In conjunction with neighborhood response, a home alarm can be a strong deterrent to crime. It may also prevent a crime-in-progress from escalating. And it may save lives and your home and property if there's a burglary or a fire.

**1. If you don't have a home alarm system from a reputable company, invest in one.**

A quality home alarm system may cost between \$500 and \$1000 for a Hills-sized house. This is not inexpensive, but replacing stolen goods may end up costing more, and personal and family safety is priceless. A quality wireless (contacts and sensors) system is reliable and less costly to install. Wired contacts/sensors are less complex and there are no batteries to replace.

**2. Have your alarm system designed for your house and for your needs.**

Your reputable alarm company should work with you to design the most protective alarm system for your home environment. Use motion detectors (passive infra-red) where you can to supplement window/door contacts (and understand their implications, such as with pets).

Other sensors such as glass break, photobeam and shock sensors may be utilized. Add smoke/heat fire and CO detectors to the alarm system where recommended--this adds further protection for your home and family and may give you a home insurance discount. You can add contacts/sensors to detached garages and even storage sheds, if they contain valuables.

Video cameras and real-time alarm system remote viewing and control are also available. Post alarm system signs around your house.

**3. Have your system monitored by a reputable company.**

This typically adds ~\$35/month to the cost. If your alarm is set off, the monitoring company can alert you if you are not at home, or a neighbor or relative, and can call the police. The police may not be able to respond immediately, but the criminal usually won't stay around to find out, especially if neighbors start to show up. And, alarms set off by a panic/holdup button are noted as such and that information is typically passed on to the police if they are called, resulting in a higher response priority. If a smoke/heat fire alarm is triggered, the monitoring company will call the fire dept, who will respond immediately.



**4. Install a loud, outside alarm bell and strobe light.**

And have an agreement with your neighbors that they will respond to your home alarm going off, and vice-versa (without putting anyone in danger, of course). This is easier when you have a strong neighborhood organization and most everyone knows each other.

Find out who in your neighborhood is retired or works from home, and get their commitment to respond to a home alarm during the work day. A neighbor can get a license plate or suspect description, phone in a secondary call to 911, or possibly by their presence (especially if several neighbors respond) result in the criminal fleeing.

The idea isn't to replace the police or put anyone in danger, but to act as a visible deterrent and to get information that could help catch the criminal. Neighbors can respond far quicker than the police.

**5. Know how your alarm system works.**

Read the manual and ask your alarm company for instruction if you're not sure. Understand the various ways to arm your zones (for when you're in the house, or away, or pets are active, etc.), and what the implications are for each. Alarm system zones may be armed for "Stay", "Away", "Instant" and "Maximum" for example, and each one has its use.

Understand how and when to bypass sensors/zones (and the implications for doing so). Use common sense--don't have an easy-to-guess alarm code (i.e. don't use your house #, for example). Know how to set a temporary alarm code that you can give to people working in/on your house.

Test your alarm on a regular basis, checking all contacts/sensors/alarms as appropriate. Practice arming/disarming. Make sure that the alarm configuration provides for proper entry and exit delays. And make sure that everyone in your family knows all of this, too.

**6. This is very important--set/arm your alarm at every opportunity!**

An unarmed alarm system is useless (except the panic button, and smoke/heat fire sensors, which are typically always in an "armed" state), and besides, you're paying for it, so use it.

Arm your system every time you leave the house, even if for a brief time. Arm your system if you're working in the back yard or basement. Arm your system before you go to sleep. Basically arm your system any time that you wouldn't want to be surprised by, and that you want to deter, someone breaking into your house.



Again, understand how to arm your system properly depending on if you are away, if you're at home, if pets are active, etc. Use your alarm--it's surprising how many burglaries take place at homes with alarms that weren't armed!

**7. Know how to use the alarm keypad panic button/key for calling police or fire.**

Make sure that your family knows this too. Practice it (call your monitoring company first to perform an alarm test). Get a remote alarm key-fob with a panic button (if your alarm system supports it) and keep it on your person at home. And understand the implications if you lose the alarm key-fob or if someone breaking into your house obtains it from you. Your key-fob/alarm may be able to be programmed such that only the key-fob panic button is operational, and the alarm-off button is not.

Talk to your alarm company about configuring a duress alarm code that can be entered under duress, but still sends a "silent alarm signal" to the monitoring company (yet one more reason to have your system monitored).

**8. Do your absolute best not to trigger your alarm by accident.**

We've all heard car alarms constantly blaring, and any alarm going off on a regular basis will soon be ignored, besides being annoying to neighbors. Be a responsible home alarm user.

**9. Think about and have a plan for what you and your family will do if your home alarm goes off when you are at home or away.**

Plan how you might respond, and where you might go for safety. A second keypad wired in your bedroom could be useful to see which contact/sensor triggered the alarm, without having to wander the house. Understand that when a monitored alarm goes off, it typically "commandeers" the land phone line to communicate with the monitoring company, and you may not be able to dial out on your land-line.

Plan with neighbors/relatives on what they should do if you're out of town and your home alarm goes off. Make sure your alarm company has a list of trusted people to call if your monitored alarm is set off.

**10. Finally, do not rely solely on your home alarm to keep you and your family safe and your possessions secure.**

Use common sense, for example don't open the door to a stranger, ever. Observe what's happening around your home and in your neighborhood. Make sure that you have secure door and window locks, reinforced door frames/jambes and other theft deterrents in place (and use them!).



Don't leave windows open that can be easily entered and don't leave a ladder outside that could be used to access 2nd story windows/decks. Buy a safe and lock your valuables in it--don't leave valuable items laying around. Those electronic keypad safes that you see in hotels cost under \$250, can be bolted down and used to store jewelry, laptops/tablets, phones, spare house and car keys, cameras, etc. Wall safes are also under \$250 and can be bolted to the wall studs and covered. A thief usually won't have time to try to break into a safe, especially if an external alarm is sounding.

Use cable locks for PCs and TVs, these will slow down a thief as well. Remember, a thief wants to get in and out as quickly as possible and anything that you can do to slow them down is to your advantage.

There are lots of tips from the police and on the Web regarding home safety--search them out and make use of them.

If you heed these recommendations you may greatly reduce the chance that your home will be broken into or that you or your family will be put in danger. You can never eliminate that chance of course, but you can significantly improve your odds. And if your home is broken into and your alarm is triggered and all your valuables are locked in a safe or secured, a thief may just run out empty-handed.

Prepared by Doug Mosher  
MSIC Steering Committee, Organized Neighborhoods/Emergency Preparedness

*The Montclair Safety and Improvement Council (MSIC) is a volunteer community advisory group to the City of Oakland, CA, whose purpose is to improve the quality of life in the greater Montclair area by promoting a variety of safety and lifestyle improvements to the area. The MSIC is a Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) that encompasses the geographical boundaries of Oakland Police Beat 13Z.*

*You can learn more about the MSIC at our Web site: [www.montclairsic.org](http://www.montclairsic.org).*