

Home Security: Security Alarms

Alarm systems are a worthwhile investment in the protection of your home and family. Studies reveal that it is far less likely that you will become the victim of a burglary at home if you have a correctly fitted and well maintained burglar alarm. However, they should be regarded only as one element within a complete security package.

The variety of alarms and their fitting is a complex subject. As a starting point the installation should meet with British Standard 4737/BS EN 50131. This type of installation refers to hard-wired systems as opposed to wire-free. Though more expensive than many wire-free or DIY packages on the market, they are more reliable and conform to the Association of Chief Police Officers Intruder Alarm Policy. The only wire free system which conforms both to British Standards and the ACPO Intruder Alarm Policy is a BS 6799 Class VI alarm. This type is typically more expensive than its hard-wired counterpart. Be aware that systems that claim to meet with British Standards, but don't specify BS 4737/BS EN 50131 or 6799, may well be referring to the electrical standard and not that of the alarm system.

If you are thinking about the installation of an alarm system in your home it is worth taking into account that the police response to alarm activations varies according to the type of alarm installed. In recent years the percentage of false alarm calls caused by either equipment, communication or user error represented in excess of 92% of all alarm activations nationally. In order to redress the balance in favour of genuine calls, the ACPO Unified Intruder Alarm Policy has been adopted by the police, in which two types of alarms are defined, together with the relevant police response.

- **Type A** - Remote Signalling Alarms, including intruder alarms terminating at approved central monitoring stations. They must be maintained and used in accordance with British Standard 4737/BS EN 50131, BS 7042 (high security systems) or BS 6799 Class VI (wire-free alarms). Such alarms will be registered with the police and identified by a unique reference number (URN) and can include personal attack alarms. The police response to their activation will be based on the assumption that an offence is taking place, but against the background of competing urgent calls and available resources. Such a response will also be conditional upon the number of false activations in any 12 month period, in which case the activation may receive a lower priority police attendance.
- **Type B** - Audible Only and Hybrid Alarms, including bells-only and automatic dialling alarms, as well as alarms from non-compliant companies and non-compliant central stations. URNs will not be issued for these systems. To obtain police attendance, in addition to their activation Type B alarms will also require some indication that an offence is in progress, e.g. from a witness.

In identifying a compliant company installing Type A alarms you should seek answers to the following questions:

1. Before disclosing personal security details, have I checked the address and credentials of the company and seen proof of identity from the representative?
2. Is the company subject of an independent inspection process and if so which organisation?
3. Is the installation of an alarm a requirement of my insurance company and if so, is the company acceptable to my insurer?
4. Can the company representative provide me with a list of police rules for occupiers of premises with alarms and written confirmation that the alarm and the company are currently acceptable to the local police for the transmission of alarm messages from new installations.
5. Have I sought written quotations from at least two alarm installers?
6. Does the quotation:
 - specify that the installation will be to British Standard 4737/ BS EN 50131 or BS 7042 (high security systems), or, if it is a wire free alarm, BS 6799 Class 6, as amended by BS DD 244?
 - include the terms of maintenance and monitoring contracts?

7. Does the company operate a 24 hour call-out service and emergency attendance within four hours?

Police accept the installation of remote signalling alarms from alarm companies whose business is subject to inspection by independent inspectorate organisations identified in police policy. Currently these are:

- **National Approval Council for Security Systems**
- **Security Systems and Alarm Inspection Board**

All of these organisations publish lists of relevant companies.

All alarm systems should have two keyholders, trained to operate the alarm, able to attend activation within 20 minutes, contactable by telephone and with their own transport.

If you are contemplating having an alarm installed and need additional advice, contact your local Crime Prevention Officer who will be happy to offer you further guidance. You may find that the cost of fitting an alarm system is lower than you originally anticipated. If several houses in a street or Neighbourhood Watch are considering installing alarm systems, it is possible that an installer may give a discount for multiple installations. What is more, it is possible that the cost of an installation could be partly offset by reduced household insurance premiums. You should be aware, however, that the insurer may stipulate that the alarm should be set at all times when the property is unoccupied, and that any claim for losses incurred as a result of a break-in while alarm was not set may be adjusted accordingly.