

Sound the Silent Alarm

Sophisticated motion sensors watch over your vacation home BY KAREN J. BANNAN

James Bond may have had fancy watches and lethal fountain pens, but even he would be impressed with the heat-sensing motion detectors that now are standard in many homes.

There is definitely a need for them, according to a report issued by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Justice Programs. Statistically, one in every 34 households experienced a burglary in 2003. Although the incidents have dropped over the last decade—in 1993 that figure was one burglary for every 17 households—there is no question that you will probably want to establish an alarm system in your vacation home. The real questions are what types of technologies will you use, and to what extent will you protect your home?

One expert says that proximity to civilization is one method he uses to assess a client's risk. "The more secluded the property, the more elaborate the system," notes Stephen Francis, owner of Pristine Property Management in Vineyard Haven, Mass. "We have one house up-island on 36 acres that is well secluded. The driveway is sensed. There are cameras throughout. There are motion sensors on key locations

around the property and sensors for outdoor lights."

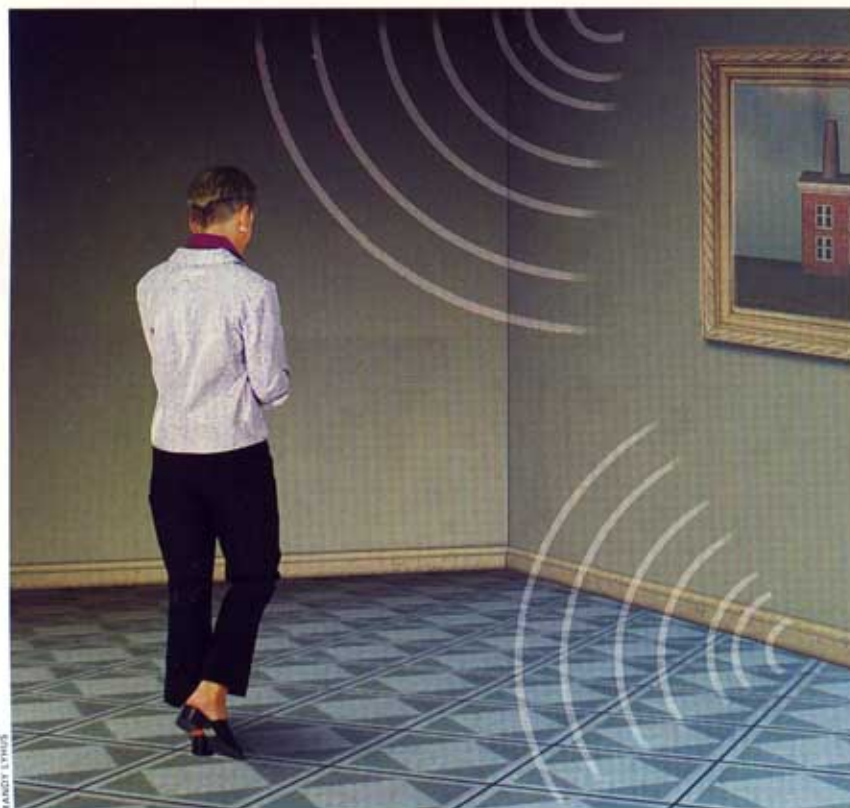
Motion detectors use several types of technology. The most common is infrared. The alarm shoots out a beam of light, which is received by a sensor. If the beam is interrupted by anything walking in front of it, an action is taken. Often, that action is an alarm or a 911 call placed to the police or a central monitoring station. Other more sophisticated systems use heat sensors to detect motion. When someone walks into a room, the sensor "sees" their body heat with the same results.

The technology is perfect for a second home where there are no cats or dogs to set off a false alarm or kids coming in late at night. That said, motion detectors are not just for when you are away from your property. Experts say that motion detectors are sometimes most important when you are in your vacation home. "Especially when your property is that secluded," Francis says. "No one is going to hear something like gun shots. It's a good thing for you and your alarm company to always know what's going on."

Motion sensors are not restricted to crime prevention. Keith Jude, president of Hilton Head Security Systems, based on Hilton Head Island, S.C., says his vacation clients are using motion sensors to keep track of family members and employees inside their homes. "We had one home with a large, sweeping staircase. The clients' nursery was on one side and their master bedroom was on the other," Jude says. "The mother was scared that the baby would get out of her crib and fall down the stairs. We put in a voice alert—a synthesized voice would state that the second-floor hallway had motion—so she didn't have to worry. We did the same thing on their back porch because it led to the pool."

Other uses of motion sensors include turning off all lights and electrical appliances after a period of no movement in a room. That means you won't be halfway to the airport and wonder if you turned off the toaster oven or the bathroom light. It is also a great way to keep tabs on a caretaker. "The system keeps track of when someone enters and leaves a room, so you know if someone was there when they said they were," explains David Daniels, president and owner of Electronic Systems Consultants in Aspen, Colo.

And, finally, there is the comfort factor. "You can set up a system to turn on the lights and bring the heating and air conditioning up to normal levels," Daniels says. "It's nice to return to a bright house whenever you have been away."



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