

A simple security system might have only door and window alarms and motion detectors. Some home alarm systems also monitor smoke alarms. Today's technology allows for video camera monitoring, remote access to a home's lights via smart phones and iPads and GSM radio communication between a homeowner and his or her alarm company. It's even possible to purchase an alarm system run through your cable television or telephone provider (Comcast or AT&T, for example).

Multi-media bells and whistles on home security can be "cool," says Eric Taylor of Bay Alarm Company, but people should not get caught up in what he calls "sexy technology."

"If we're talking security, let's focus on keeping the family safe." The premise of a burglar alarm, he says, is not to catch a thief once they're inside, but to keep thieves out of your home. Taylor says major security alarm manufacturers—Digital Monitoring Products, Honeywell, GE, and DSC, for example – all offer the same technology and basically the same equipment. GoControl and 2Gig are relatively new to the home security system business.

Those who have or want to install an alarm system should take steps to ensure their system does not trigger false alarms. "We respond to a lot of alarms," says Christensen. "Every time we go as if there is someone in the house, because once in a while an alarm means that someone is really there." Orinda Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings says his department answered 1,408 alarm calls in 2011, "the vast majority of which were false." Because of that some law enforcement agencies (although not those in Lamorinda) have even stopped answering burglar alarm calls.

The response to false alarms is an "ongoing problem," says Priebe, whose department responded to 207 false alarms in 2011. "Moraga Police Department will always respond to alarm calls," he says, even though his department "would rather be using police personnel to address other areas of concern."



Typical security system control panel



Door sensor



A sign in the front yard points out the security system