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Alarm Verification Saves Police Resources While Keeping Homes Secure

By Laura Williams◦ **Jul 18, 2011**

If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, does it make a sound? Similarly, if an alarm is triggered and no one responds, is it, in fact, a real alarm?

The false alarm problem is not going away – it's getting worse. And, as false alarm rates continue to skyrocket, they've prompted more and more municipalities and police departments to impose a "no response unless verified" policy. The Fremont, Calif., police department states the rationale behind the move to this policy clearly on its website. According to Craig T. Steckler, Fremont's chief of police, "The Fremont Police Department, like most law enforcement agencies across the United States, has been responding to alarm calls since our existence as a law enforcement agency. Our studies have shown that, historically, over 98.5 percent of our alarm calls are false alarms. This number has held for many years and continues even today. … Alarm calls represent the single highest volume call for service received by the police department, accounting for just over 11 percent of all calls for service. … Not needing to respond to over 6,900 false alarms is a way to save resources, personnel and equipment costs and still have personnel available for emergencies."

In his report on Fremont residents and alarm owners, Steckler addressed the all-important question: Are people going to die as a result of the police not responding? "Intrusion alarms are designed to protect property, not people. Alarms featuring panic buttons, duress or robbery buttons are alarms systems to protect people, and we will still respond to those types of alarms, and they will be a high-priority response for the police department."

Steckler went on to explain that "Verified response has been in effect in a number of cities throughout the United States and has shown to be highly effective in saving police resources. No study has shown conclusively that the crime of burglary has risen where verified response is the norm for responding to alarm calls."

As Mark Ingram, president of Visonic Inc., pointed to the origins of the verified response movement. "'Listen In' (Sonitrol technology and others) has been available for many years, and like most technologies, has come a long way. These systems have a threshold of opening a voice path to the

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central station and an operator then makes a judgment call as to the sound. Inherently, the issue becomes the judgment call of the operator. Additionally, the trend of having the central station call the premise has been more of a prevailing verified response for ten-plus years."

Visual alarm verification – the ability to view surveillance of what is happening inside a monitored premise remotely whenever an alarm is triggered – is inevitably the best bet to ensure that police cars roll in response to a real alarm event now and into the future.

To meet this critical consumer need and guarantee response, Visonic launched RealAlarm, a home security solution that enables central monitoring stations to accurately assess the situation inside the premises in the event of an alarm and immediately assess whether the event is a real emergency or a false alarm.

When the NEXT CAM PIR motion detector, which is coupled with a camera in a single housing, detects motion, the camera is activated and begins to capture clear images, day or night. The instant-capture technology guarantees snapshots of even fast-moving intruders. It also enables visual verification of fire and panic alarms, ensuring the response is handled by the appropriate emergency service.

The system is active at all times, but the passive infrared camera captures and transmits images only when an alarm is activated, giving homeowners privacy and security at the same time. For dealers and integrators, it's easily and cost-effectively installed as a standalone or as an add-on to existing alarm system. Enrollment, configuration and diagnostics of panel, peripherals and RF link quality, and walk test can all be done remotely.

PowerG, Visonic's recently introduced wireless technology for intrusion alarm systems, now serves as the underlying technology for all of the company's new intrusion alarm systems and solutions. RealAlarm works with the company's PowerManage IP/GPRS-based alarm monitoring platform.

These technologies create the conditions for a longer battery life, a of transmission range of 6,000 feet line-of-sight, as well as strength against interference. Two-way wireless frequency hopping spread spectrum technology provides robustness and reliability close to that of wired systems. This AES-128 encrypted wireless communication surpasses industry standards.

"With more and more law enforcement authorities demanding verification before following up on an alarm, RealAlarm provides the perfect solution for homeowners and central monitoring stations alike," noted Laila Arad-Alan, vice president of marketing at Visonic. "Homeowners retain their privacy while having the peace of mind that when there is an emergency, the authorities will be on their way. Central monitoring stations save the costs of responding to false alarms and also gain confidence knowing their staff will no longer enter a dangerous situation unprepared."

"I believe that the technology of video verification will endear itself to our industry much more rapidly than other technologies simply as a result of municipalities' refusal to dispatch without positive proof something is occurring at the premise," Ingram added. "Products for the purpose are few and, until recently, on the expensive side and did not use GPRS communications to send video. As costs of installing and monitoring verified response systems lessen and dealers understand the potential of increasing RMR, the mainstream use of video verification products is today."

RealAlarm is a win-win-win solution for security dealers and integrators, end users and law enforcement, Ingram contended. "With an advanced visual alarm verification solution such as RealAlarm managed by PowerManage, everyone in the security services chain benefits. Visonic is very proud to bring this innovative, visual alarm verification solution to market."

A bout the Author

Laura Williams is content development editor for Security Products magazine.

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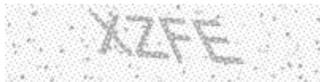
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