

Buyer Beware!!

There's a knock on the door and as you open the door there is a smiling face who tells you they're in the neighborhood checking with the neighbors, expressing their concerns for your safety and offering to **GIVE you free of charge** an alarm system to protect your family from a potential burglar entering your residence. Their "FREE" alarm system can be installed within a few days and will give you the peace of mind you and your family need in this day and age by providing you with a state of the art system that will alert you to a break-in attempt and will call the police for you within seconds of them receiving the signal. The sales person points out what a lovely home you have, noting the curb appeal, possessions in the home and being sure to play on the age of the alarm user or their children. Having this system will protect you. They could offer you a monthly discount if you sign up now or provide them names of other potential customers.

DON'T BUY THAT – Your free alarm system could cost you thousands of dollars.

There are hundreds of companies who bring in sales people from out of state. They put them up in hotel rooms and then take them out to canvas neighborhoods looking for potential customers. Some are reputable – others are like Piranhas looking for their next commission check. Some have done their homework by going to your local police records unit and checking to see where a burglary happened. They will then canvas that neighborhood and advising the potential customer of the incident. Their soft spoken concern for their potential customer is a means for them to win your confidence and have a contract signed. Comments heard mostly were "he seemed like such a nice young man" A few days later, after the installation of the alarm system there are potential problems. The Police have been called for an alarm call and like most alarm calls, their "FALSE ALARMS." Now, you're being charged for false alarm fines by your local police department. . You try to get a hold of someone from the installation company to come out and fix the system and that call for service can go unanswered, ignored or it will take a week or more for someone to come out. Your monitoring company most likely is not the installer of the system and you need to remember who that is. In the mean time, the system faults over and over again. This is very frustrating and expensive to the consumer.

Some companies say they represent a nationwide company but in fact, do not. They are just installing the equipment manufactured by them but are a totally different company.

Most cities have an ordinance regarding False Burglar Alarms. Some offer a few free false alarms per year and then charge for subsequent alarms. Other Cities don't respond at all because so many of the burglar alarm calls are false. They will only respond if there is verifiable evidence of a break-in. Nationwide approximately 98% of all burglar alarm calls are false. The costs to the responding Police agencies are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Most of these costs are borne by the taxpayer. Alarm fines charged by Cities help to make up for that loss. **Contact your local Police Department or alarm administrator what potential costs there may be for False Alarms.**

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO:

1. Take the time to call your local City business office to see if the sales person and company soliciting you need to be licensed.
2. Check to be sure they're carrying a license to operate if your city requires that. If not, ask them to leave.. Document your conversation. Get the sales person's name/phone number

and that of the company he/she represents. Ask them for a copy of the City's ordinance. Minneapolis requires them to provide you with one.

3. Get a written statement – **not estimate** from the sales person listing **all** the fees. They may offer the system free but may charge you for installation and will **ALWAYS** charge you a monthly monitoring fee. This will either be monthly or yearly. Some will require you to have that fee either charged directly to a credit card or automatic debit from your checking account on a monthly basis. Some may send hard copy bills. Monitoring can cost \$30-\$50.00 or more per month. The contracts are anywhere from two to three years.

Ask what their policy is if the alarm is the result of equipment or alarm company error. Will they reimburse you? What is the cost of a service call?

Get this in writing on the contract also.

4. **Don't sign up right away or feel pressured to do so.** There are many alarm companies out there to choose from. Don't rely on a nationwide company to be the best choice. Some installers contract with alarm companies who monitor their customers systems and may not be in the same state.

You as the contract holder for this alarm system are the responsible party for any fines incurred as a result of false alarms. Most alarms are caused by either user error, faulty or badly installed alarm equipment, monitoring company errors, etc. The City does not negotiate with the alarm company. This is a civil issue between you and the alarm company. It's like any other personal property you own.

There are no guarantees in life for anything but doing a little homework before signing a contract for a burglar alarm system or any product sold door to door will at least give you a little more peace of mind. If in doubt, especially for the seniors in our communities, if someone wants to sell you something please discuss any potential services or work you need on your home with a trusted family member, friend and local government. They don't want to see you in harms way and will protect you the best way they can. You have to be wary and do your homework. It could save you a lot of time and money

You can view the City of Minneapolis ordinance on False Alarms by accessing the Cities web page at www.municode.com/resources/gateway.asp?pid=11490. Click on Title 13 and enter chapter 176 in the upper left hand corner.

Check with your local governmental office for their web site and ordinance.

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