

THINKING ABOUT BUYING AN ALARM SYSTEM?

FEELING PRESSURED BY THE SALESMAN? Have you been told by an alarm company salesman that their system is better than any other, and that because they are so good, the Sheriff's Office will respond to their signals faster? Have you been told by an alarm company salesperson that the Sheriff's Office response is guaranteed to be within 3 to 5 minutes?

Have you been told by an alarm company salesperson that they are going to give you a "free" alarm system that will protect your home or business from an intruder? That all you have to do is sign on for a 3 or 5 year monitoring contract at a set price per month? Has the salesman told you that the "free" system they are installing, (which usually consists of a motion detector and two door contacts), is all you need to secure your home or business?

Do you feel you are being pressured or coerced into buying a system "today" or "right now", because the price is a "one time only" deal, or because the crime rate in your neighborhood is so high you need the protection of an alarm system as soon as possible, or for any other creative reason the salesman comes up with?

If you have been told these things by any alarm company salesperson in their sales pitch, do not do business with that company. Reputable companies do not employ those tactics to get your business.

The Sheriff's Office will never endorse any particular alarm company. We cannot guarantee any alarm company is better than any other. At best, we can only advise which companies are active in false alarm reduction, and which companies are willing to work with us to achieve that.

When your alarm signal is activated the monitoring company is required by Florida State Statute to call inside the business or residence to verify the alarm as valid. If no answer is received, they are then required to call a secondary phone number to ascertain if the alarm user wants a law enforcement response. If the alarm user does want deputies to respond, the monitoring company will then call the appropriate agency for dispatch. The deputy assigned to the call will respond from his current location, which may be miles from the alarm. Given all the steps necessary in the handling of an alarm call, in addition to traffic concerns depending on the time of day, ***it is impossible*** for any law enforcement agency to guarantee they will be on scene within 3 to 5 minutes. The Orange County Sheriff's Office dispatches all alarm calls as soon as possible, but there is always the chance that there may not be an available unit at the time of the alarm call, or that the unit may be responding from a different part of the county.

An alarm system is not "free", if the company requires you to sign on for a monitoring contract in order to get it, or if there is an installation charge for the equipment. Many companies require a monitoring contract period of between 2 and 5 years, with a monthly payment paid by the alarm user. Many times the "free" system includes only one inexpensive motion detector and two door contacts, and you will have to pay extra for any additional equipment needed to properly secure your home or business. All points of entry and exit should be alarmed, and the equipment should be quality equipment, properly installed by licensed contractors. ***All of the equipment installed*** should be of the new "false alarm reducing" technology. If you are installing the cheapest and most basic equipment in order to save money, there is a good chance you will have false alarms, which may cost you more money in false alarm fines and frequent system repair bills.

Do not let any salesperson pressure you into buying a system right then and there, especially if they tell you their offer is only good for that day. Legitimate companies want you to be an informed consumer, and want you to compare what they offer and what others offer. They want customers that are happy with what they buy and that trust the company they buy from. Interview two or three companies and compare everything they are offering. Decide what you need, make comparisons, and make an informed decision based on your needs and budget. Keep in mind that you really do get what you pay for, so be sure you are buying an alarm system that will satisfy all of your needs and concerns.

Before you make a final decision, check the alarm company's license status on the Department of Professional and Business Regulation website, and check with the Better Business Bureau for any complaints against the company. Clicking on the useful links tab on this web page will provide you with shortcuts to those websites. Before you sign a contract, be sure to check the fine print on the back of the contract and determine if you can break the contract without penalty if you are not satisfied with the service. Be sure you have a thorough understanding of the terms of the contract before you sign.

WHAT SHOULD I THINK ABOUT BEFORE BUYING AN ALARM SYSTEM?

Consider what type of system would be best for your particular needs. When interviewing alarm companies, ask the salesperson to explain all of the options available to you. Make a decision based on what you need, and be sure the system is able to handle all of your security needs.

Do not cut corners if it will compromise your safety, and remember you get what you pay for. A "bargain" system is not a bargain if it frequently malfunctions or causes you to incur false alarm fines in the future. Buy a quality system that suits your needs. If you decide to rent vs. buy, who is responsible for the maintenance of the system? If you rent it, will the company make necessary repairs free of charge, or will you be charged a fee? If you buy it, what type of warranty does the company give on both equipment and installation? How long will it take to get service if the system malfunctions or needs replacement parts such as batteries? Who will pay for false alarm fines if they are caused by faulty equipment? **GET IT IN WRITING!**

Does the entire system conform to current ANSI, and UL (or the equivalent) standards, and does it meet local code requirements? Is the company licensed by the state to install alarm systems? All alarm companies must display their state license number on their business cards and any sales material they are giving you. Check with the Department of Business & Professional Regulations to make sure the license is current and valid. This can be done online, by entering DBPR in your search engine. In addition, any actions taken against the alarm company for fraud, improper sales techniques, etc., can be viewed on the Florida Attorney General's website. Florida State Statute 489 Part II covers all aspects of alarm company rules and regulations; check it out online before you buy. Be sure to use a licensed, bonded and insured contractor. If you use an unlicensed contractor, your insurance coverage may be voided, and you may not be able to place a claim against any damages you may incur. Licensing laws are in place to protect you; use them to your advantage. Finally, check for any complaints against the company with the Better Business Bureau, to see if there is a pattern of poor customer service or failure to address and rectify consumer complaints satisfactorily.

Per Florida State Statute 489, Part II, all alarm sales persons and installers must have an FDLE background check done, and must display a picture I.D. on their person, in clear view of the customer. If your installer does not have a picture I.D., ask him/her to produce it immediately. If he/she cannot or will not produce the proper identification, don't do business with that person! In addition, they are required to have BASA/FASA training and certification, and all written materials they give you must have their alarm company license number on them. Always be sure to double check with the alarm company if you have any doubts as to the person or persons they have sent to your home or business, whether it is for sales, installation, or repair. If any person just "shows up" at your door trying to sell you an alarm system, don't let them into your home until you contact the alarm company they represent, and you are comfortable with them being there. If they refuse to leave at your request, call 911 for assistance.

Be sure the company is bonded and insured. Find out if the company has a local number to call or if you must call long-distance. Get a list of all phone numbers you will need for assistance, service, etc. Ask for the name of the person you will be dealing with if a problem arises. Ask who you will deal with if you are not getting satisfaction with a problem; is there a General Manager who will assist you? Ask who will monitor the alarm. Be sure the monitoring company is also properly licensed in the state of Florida. If you or any of your family members or employees have special needs, be sure the monitoring station can properly assist you and is ADA compliant where required.

Designate your responders, persons who can respond to the alarm location with a key to assist the deputies with access to the building, and who may act as your agent in the event of a burglary or emergency. Submit an accurate, up to date responder list to the alarm company, as well as to your local law enforcement agency if required. Update the list as necessary to keep the information current and accurate. Also, check any registration or permit requirements in your area.

Why are responders necessary? Law enforcement cannot get inside locked buildings without a key, and your safety or your employees' safety could be compromised if someone is still inside the building when you return home or open for business. Many times burglars enter through a roof, or some other difficult to see place, and the deputies need to be able to do a thorough check of the inside of the building as well as the outside. Never check the building yourself before the deputies get there; you could be injured or worse.

BE AN EDUCATED CONSUMER. Get several estimates from different companies, and be certain that you are comfortable with the company and monitoring service you choose. Have the salesperson tell you everything you need to know about the system and the monitoring company, and get everything in writing. **ANYTHING THE SALESPERSON GUARANTEES TO YOU VERBALLY SHOULD BE IN WRITING** on the company letterhead or worksheet, signed, and dated by both you and the salesperson. Once the system is installed, all household members or business employees with access to the system should be thoroughly trained in its use by the installer, to include the proper procedures for arming, disarming, and cancelling law enforcement response to a false alarm.

ONE WORD OF CAUTION: **NEVER** let any salesperson inside your home, or answer personal questions about the layout of your home, your everyday habits and lifestyle, work hours, vacation plans, etc. or information on your current alarm system, until you have verified they are a legitimate representative of a legitimate, properly licensed and bonded alarm company

Finally, remember that an alarm system is a deterrent, and should be considered as only one part of an overall security plan. The types of doors, windows, locks, outdoor lighting and landscaping used are equally important in making your home or business more secure. Visit www.ocso.com/securityalarms to learn more. If you would like further information or assistance when considering the purchase of an alarm system, please call the Orange County Sheriff's Office Alarm Administrator at 407-836-3969. Office hours are Monday through Friday, from 8:00am to 4:00pm or email at faru@ocsofl.com.