

Home security top concern, poll finds

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If only the back door had been locked ...

It might have deterred an intruder from entering the home of a mother of two recently in St. Catharines. He tied up the family with packing tape, stole money and sexually assaulted her 5-year-old.

If only the alarm system had worked properly ...

This case involved a famous home-invasion victim, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Andre Dallerie was found guilty last year, though not criminally responsible because of his mental condition, of break-and-enter and trying to murder Chrétien after invading his Ottawa residence. An alarm sounded, but apparently a buzzer in the guardhouse wasn't set off.

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From a single mother to Canada's political leader, home-security concerns have become a priority.

A recent Angus Reid survey of 1,509 adults, done for Canadian Tire Corp., concludes that theft is second only to fire hazards in top home concerns. That's what 72 per cent of the respondents say.

It's the reason 70 per cent of them have installed deadbolts to protect themselves. In comparison, only 20 per cent have alarm systems.

Canadian Security magazine says 54 per cent of break-and-enters are by forcing the door lock.

Another study says a residential burglary occurs in Canada every 90 seconds. The majority of burglars are young males invading homes for kicks or a few bucks to feed their drug habits.

According to StatsCan, more than 80 per cent of those charged with break-and-enters are aged 12 to 25. About one in three is 17 or younger.

Simple no-cost methods such as ensuring doors are locked can deter many would-be thieves, investing in peace of mind on other fronts has become more expensive.

Some home-security companies are linking with furniture and other retailers offering a throw-in system with a purchase. But there are hidden costs, warns Chris Konstantas, operations manager for Toronto's F.I.S.T. Security Ltd.

Konstantas sells security systems, monitored through a central computerized unit of workers, but he stresses: "They're only a means of detection, not prevention."

So-called free systems are usually basic units costing less than \$200 that come with monitoring fees, between \$25 and \$30 monthly, and long-term leases, he adds.

In a growing number of municipalities, there are also new charges to cover false alarms. In Metropolitan Toronto, for instance, police charge \$73.50 for each accidental alarm tripping.

More alarm companies are hiring private guards who are usually at the site of a break-in in less than 15 minutes. They, too, hit the consumer's pocket-book.

The biggest selling point of anti-theft systems is would-be intruders are warned away from homes by stickers indicating they're outfitted with alarms, says home-security researcher Kevin Wiseberg.

"But more Canadians want to prevent break-ins, not deal with them," Wiseberg stresses. "A burglar can get in and out of a house in less than 10 minutes through any home-security system, and police usually take more than 20 minutes, if not more, to get there."

Wiseberg and Konstantas offer some home security tips:



CP PHOTO

BLAST AFTERMATH: RCMP Const. Jennifer Forbes stands beside the broken door of a Cranbrook, B.C., home last June. A man blasted the door with a shotgun to gain entry and then take hostages.

■ Make sure locks on basement windows, the most vulnerable break-in spot in a house, are secure. Add metal security bars or use wired, safety laminated or tempered glass.

■ Flimsy locks on patio doors are also a major break-and-enter point. Consider adding aux-

iliary locks or add-on security devices. Make sure sliding doors can't be lifted out of their tracks from the outside.

■ Keep entrances and windows clear from fences or hedges that burglars can hide behind.

■ Consider installing exterior lights with motion detectors.