



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SECURITY ASSOCIATION

RECEIVED  
CLA

03 MAR 11 PM 2:38

March 10, 2003

Mr. Ronald F. Deaton  
Chief Legislative Analyst  
200 N. Spring Street Room 255  
Los Angeles CA 90012-3238

Re: Burglar Alarm Task Force

Dear Mr. Deaton,

I would like to comment on three items discussed during the last meeting of the Burglar Alarm Task Force.

### Audio Verification

Although audio verification systems may have their uses, they are not the ultimate answer to the false alarm problem. One major drawback is that they are silent alarms, as the sound of a bell or siren would interfere with the listen-in process. A burglar would not necessarily know that he had been detected, and therefore a system with audio verification may have less deterrent value than a conventional system.

A second drawback is that audio verification depends on the skill and judgment of the central station operator. According to the Sonitrol representative, approximately two-thirds of the alarms dispatched to the police by Sonitrol last year were false. In addition, there have been instances where burglars either did not make enough noise to alert the central station, or the central station operator did not interpret the sounds as indicative of a burglary. However, in fairness to Sonitrol and other listen-in companies, every type of alarm system has failed at one time or another.

Audio verification systems may not be a good choice for protecting a residence while people are at home. First, the sirens must not sound during the listen-in period, reducing the chances of scaring off an intruder, and also reducing the chances of alerting the residents. Second, audio verification may not work reliably when the occupants are present. The sounds may be coming from an intruder, or from the legitimate occupants of the premises, and the operator may not be able to tell the difference. Third, in many homes the windows are set up so that they can be open a few inches for ventilation while the alarm is on, or the windows may be equipped with special "alarm screens." In either case, a burglar may make little or no noise when entering the home, leading to an alarm that cannot be verified by audio means.

The Police Commission has indicated it will not accept audio verification as a means of verification because some audio systems use cheap components and produce low quality audio. This line of reasoning does not seem to make much sense, since an inferior audio verification system would not produce a clear enough signal to verify the presence of an intruder. That

would seem to be a powerful disincentive for an alarm company to use poor quality audio verification equipment.

### **“Cross-zoning” as a means of verification**

“Cross-zoning,” or “sequential verification,” refers generally to requiring alarms from two or more sensors before the police are notified. The Police Commission has indicated it is opposed to this form of verification because it does nothing to reduce false alarms caused by user error. However, systems using audio or video verification have exactly the same shortcoming: a central station operator who receives an alarm may not be able to tell whether the person he is hearing or viewing is authorized to be on the premises.

Multiple alarms from multiple sensors provide a good indication that someone is actually present in the building. Additional procedures, such as making multiple telephone calls to the premises and to authorized persons, can help screen out user-caused false alarms.

Sequential verification is an accepted method of alarm verification throughout England. In fact, the Association of British Insurers requires the use of sequential verification even in systems that incorporate audio or video verification, due to the possibility that an intruder may evade or defeat the audio or video verification devices.

### **Alarm response does not consume 15% of police patrol time**

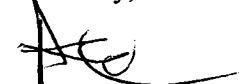
The Police Commission’s executive director, Joe Gunn, is fond of stating that responding to false alarms consumes 15% of police patrol time. The facts do not support this claim.

It is true that alarm calls make up roughly 15% of all calls responded to by the police, however not all calls for police service require the same amount of time to handle. One call might be a false burglar alarm, while the next call might be a gang shooting that ties up many officers for hours. Therefore, eliminating alarm calls does not translate into a 15% increase in patrol time, even though it would eliminate 15% of the total number of calls.

Mr. Gunn has stated that the equivalent of 80 police officers per year are used for alarm response, based on the number of alarm calls and the average amount of time spent on each one. Assuming this number is correct (and we believe the actual number is closer to 57), this represents 2% of the roughly 4000 officers assigned to patrol operations. Although this is still a significant amount of resources, it is considerably less than the 15% figure claimed by Mr. Gunn.

There is no “pot of gold” of available patrol time waiting at the end of the verified response rainbow.

Sincerely,



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SECURITY ASSOCIATION  
Arnie Bell  
President  
(213) 422-1619 (cell)  
scsapresident@socal.rr.com