



BUILDERS CHOICE[®] MAGAZINE

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HIGH-TECH DETERRENCE

Video and audio surveillance

As little as ten years ago, installing video cameras at construction jobsites was a hassle because of the cabling required and because most jobsites didn't have a hardwired Internet connection available. Today, both video and audio security systems are commonly installed by large tract homebuilders and commercial contractors. The side benefit? Lower insurance costs. Insurers of larger-scale construction projects require jobsite security, and though high-tech security isn't cheap, over time it can be a lot less expensive than security guards.

One of the largest providers of video and audio security to homebuilders in North America is Sonitrol, whose Canadian operations are based in Surrey, B.C. Company spokesman Joe Wilson says that "naivety" is the biggest reason that residential contractors are victimized by thieves, vandals and arsonists.

"They will say, 'Well, it hasn't happened to me' and feel comfortable with that," Wilson says. But he believes that criminal activity on construction sites—big and small—is

being driven up by the "economic tsunami" that has hit the industry in many areas of Canada.

"We're seeing appliance theft, furnaces being ripped out, copper theft, large-scale tool thefts. We're seeing vandalism and arson on sites where there were security guards working. Some insurers still think guards work; but guards can sleep through, can be offsite when the loss occurs—or they may even participate in the activity."

Sonitrol's construction security system, Sonavision, consists of multiple cameras, which can be combined with Sonitrol audio devices, strung around the perimeter and key locations of a jobsite. The cameras stream video clips to central monitoring stations that can relay the video direct to the police if a crime is believed to be progress.

"The documented police response time in the U.S. and Canada is under five minutes," Wilson says. Sonitrol says its systems have been involved in the apprehension of over 160,000 criminals at its various sites since 1977. Wilson says his company's false alarm rate is only about three per cent.

Still, Wilson acknowledges that, while tract builders are coming on board, few custom homebuilders and renovators in Canada have adopted monitored video and audio security systems. "If a builder thinks he can invest a couple of thousand dollars and be fully protected, he can't," Wilson says. But he points out that Sonitrol's basic systems can cost as little as \$3,000 a month—still a lot less than the cost for security guards at a large jobsites.

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Jobsite Theft

Stopping it on your jobsite. By Stephen Payne