

Home Alarm Services 101

Under what circumstances should/would I install a burglar or fire or medical alert system? What are the main differences and can I expect to pay for this service or receive it free? The purpose of this bulletin is to describe various types of alarm services that are available. Much more detailed information about alarm devices, services and the prevention of false alarms is available in the consumer section of our web site at www.faraonline.org.

Burglar alarm – “Someone is breaking into my house!”



- You will pay for intrusion detectors, wiring and equipment that will sound the alarm when activated.
- For monitoring to work, you must turn the alarm on at night, or when you leave the house, and turn it off in the morning, or when you return.
- If you contract for the service, a message will be sent to the monitoring company when an alarm is triggered. The monitoring company should contact you to confirm the need for law enforcement response.
- The monitoring company will charge you a fee for monitoring.

Fire alarm – “A fire has started in my house!”

- You will pay for the equipment (smoke detectors and/or sprinkler heads) installation.
- The alarm will sound in your house to alert you to leave the house immediately to escape the fire.
- If you want to have an alarm message sent to a monitoring company so they can call the fire department, you must pay for additional equipment to be installed, and the monitoring company will charge you a fee for this monitoring service.



Medical alarm – “I need medical help!”

- You will pay for the signaling device and equipment.
- You must keep the signaling device on your person or within reach in order to use it.
- There are two different and distinct things that can happen when you activate your medical alarm depending on what you have purchased.
 1. A monitoring company can monitor your medical alarm and receive the signal when you activate it. You and the monitoring company must agree in advance what the monitoring company will do when they receive your signal; i.e., call your home to determine if an emergency really exists, call a neighbor or family member to check up on you, or immediately request that rescue personnel respond. The monitoring company will charge a fee for this service.
 2. An alarm message can be sent directly to a relative or friend, whoever you designate, who can respond in person or call you to verify the alarm and then call another to provide emergency assistance. No fee should be charged for monitoring.



911 telephone call – “I need help!” and I can describe what I need and where I am.

- A 911 call can be made by dialing “9-1-1” on the telephone, for any type of emergency. A city or county employee will answer and dispatch the appropriate emergency assistance.
- You already pay a small charge on your monthly telephone bill for this service.

The burglar, fire and medical systems will all require routine inspection and maintenance. You should discuss your specific alarm system’s requirements with your alarm company, as well as what maintenance should be performed, when and by whom. For smoke detectors and medical alarm devices with self-contained batteries, remember to change the batteries at least once a year and at any time there is an indication of a low battery condition. For additional information on this topic, false alarm prevention and other alarm issues, visit FARA’s web site at www.faraonline.org.