



SAFE AND SOUND

*Hassle-free home security
that actually works.*

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Caption to come

Every time I'm a guest at a house where the owners take home security seriously, I find the same question popping into my head: What's worse, the criminals who want to steal our stuff or the daily grind of dealing with multiple security codes, fumbling with a handful of different keys that all look the same, and enduring an alarm system that wakes up the entire house every time someone comes home late?

The fact is, living with home security features

day after day can be a huge hassle. Truth be told, the hardware we trust to keep bad guys at bay isn't nearly as effective as we'd like to believe. But it doesn't have to be this way. Emerging technology and some practical knowledge can make home security almost as easy to live with as the good old days when no one ever locked their doors. Design your system correctly and you'll also enjoy a level of household security that actually works in today's real world.

Safe and Sound

Start With Smart Locks: Keys can be lost, stolen, given to the wrong people or copied by criminals. Keys are also a hassle to find, use and distribute to friends, family members and authorized tradespeople. That's why the foundation of the most hassle-free home security systems begins with key-free locks. There are two ways to go: push-button combination locks or the new consumer-grade biometric hardware.

Key-free, digital combination deadbolts are popping up in the form of reliable, reasonably priced models designed for residential use and that's a good thing for several reasons. Everyone in your household needs only to remember a few numbers punched into the keypad and the door opens. If they ever forget, keys still work, too.

Key-free systems make more practical sense than ever in a world where members of most households come and go to the rhythm of their own drummer. The combination pad systems I've tested use four AA-batteries that operate a small electric motor that activates the deadbolt mechanism. During normal use, a set of alkalines lasts about a year. This technology has been around for more than a decade. It's reliable, effective and mature.

The next step beyond push-button combination

deadbolts uses something called biometrics instead of memorized code numbers. Biometrics is a generic technology that recognizes unique features of the human body to allow access to specific individuals while denying it to everyone else. Until recently, biometrics was too complex and expensive for use in consumer-grade security applications, but that's changing. For about \$200, you can equip your home with a deadbolt lock system that reads fingerprints just like they do in the spy movies.

The biometric lock I've tested includes a small, weatherproof shroud that extends below the bottom side of the lock body. This shroud houses an optical reader that registers and recognizes individual fingerprints for entry access. If the system knows you, a finger swipe retracts the deadbolt. If it doesn't, nothing happens.

Three swipes of a finger are required for initial registration. I found the system a little finicky until I got the hang of it. But once you're registered, and you gain some practice swiping your finger consistently, biometrics is the slickest way to open a lock. The technology isn't perfect yet, so young kids sometimes have trouble activating the system, though keys still work as usual. But even as they exist today, biometric locks are amazingly versatile.



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Caption to come Besides restricting access to specific people, the system can be programmed to let in certain individuals at only certain times of the day or week. Allow your plumber and electrician access to the home this week during business hours, for instance, then restrict access when their jobs are done.

As useful as digital locks are, some people just don't get along with fancy technology. If this is you, it still pays to understand advances being engineered into seemingly conventional lock hardware. The Weiser SmartKey system is a case in point. It's a unique deadbolt mechanism that can be rekeyed by anyone in less than 30 seconds. Insert a working key into the lock, turn it 90 degrees clockwise, then remove the key. Insert the thin metal tool included with the system into a small slot in the lock face, remove it, and then insert a new key. That's it. The new key works and the old one doesn't. If ever you feel the security of your current keys have been compromised, or you want to have all locks in your home keyed alike no matter what changes happen in the future, the SmartKey system makes you do it instantly, without a locksmith.

A Door Worth Locking: Most law-abiding Canadians never break into a house, and that's why they don't understand how futile it is to lock an ordinary wooden entry door. Fact is, any person of ordinary strength can easily force open a wooden door in less than a minute with nothing more than a few good hits with a shoulder or foot. I know because I did it when I was 12-years-old and locked out of my house. I've also seen more than half a dozen break-ins that all show the same sobering evidence. The weak link isn't the door itself, or the lock. It's the doorjamb. The wood is thin where the deadbolt interlocks with the jamb, and it's easy to break, allowing full, easy and rapid access to your home. If all you have is an ordinary wooden door jamb, then you're protected by nothing more than a piece of softwood that's thinner than a tomato plant stake.

Even as most Canadians lock their doors with a sense of false security, the reality of this situation still has big implications. Every security system is only as strong as its weakest link.

Consider the facts: The average police response time to a home security alarm call often rises to longer than 20 minutes, yet a thief can be in and out



Caption to come



Keeping an Eye on Things

Sometimes seeing delivers peace of mind, and that's where the Zonet ZVC7630W can help. It's at the leading edge of small-scale technologies that allow ordinary people to remotely keep an unusually keen eye on things. And a keen ear on things, too.

The unit is a small, wireless surveillance device that connects to your existing Wi-Fi network, allowing real-time video and audio to be seen on your computer screen. This footage can also be recorded and even emailed. The motion-sensitive unit is especially designed to pick up visuals under low light conditions and offers two-way voice communications, too. On the downside, the unit must be protected from the weather and from temperatures lower than 0 C. It also needs to be within five feet of an electrical outlet.

At about \$350, the ZVC7630W isn't cheap enough to qualify as a casual purchase for most homeowners. You also need to know something about setting up and maintaining a wireless network in order to get the camera working. But beyond the practical value of the ZVC7630W right now, the device is important because of what it means. Security technologies that used to be affordable only by large organizations and the wealthy are becoming cheaper, better and more effective. We'll be seeing more of this soon.

of your house through ordinary doors in less than five. What good is an alarm system in a situation like this? It only serves to annoy the neighbours unless it's also coupled with a trustworthy door.

There are two ways to prevent a thief from kicking in your door. All-metal, commercial-grade doors and jambs are much stronger than wood and virtually kick-proof, though they can look less than ideal on the front of a home. They're also expensive to buy and require special skills to install.



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Another approach involves reinforcing your existing wooden door and jamb in key places with sheet steel. You could do this work on your own if you're handy with metal, but a simpler option is a new product called Door Jamb Armor. It's a system of steel hardware that caps the door jamb, the edge of the door around the handle and the hinge areas. Besides making the door much, much more kick resistant, Door Jamb Armor is also an excellent way to repair the damage caused by a previous break-in. Instead of the tedious job of repairing or replacing the wooden jamb and refinishing it, the steel system caps the damage while preventing it from happening again. Installation takes about an hour using a cordless drill. And while the work does demand some DIY skills to complete, it's far less troublesome than repairing a wooden jamb that'll only fail again later if criminals ever come back.

Home security is a growing hassle for most Canadians, but it doesn't have to be this way. As you upgrade your existing security hardware or tackle renovations that demand new locks and exterior doors, think keyless and think strong. The results will leave you safe, sound and a lot more hassle-free. For more information, see page tk. H&C