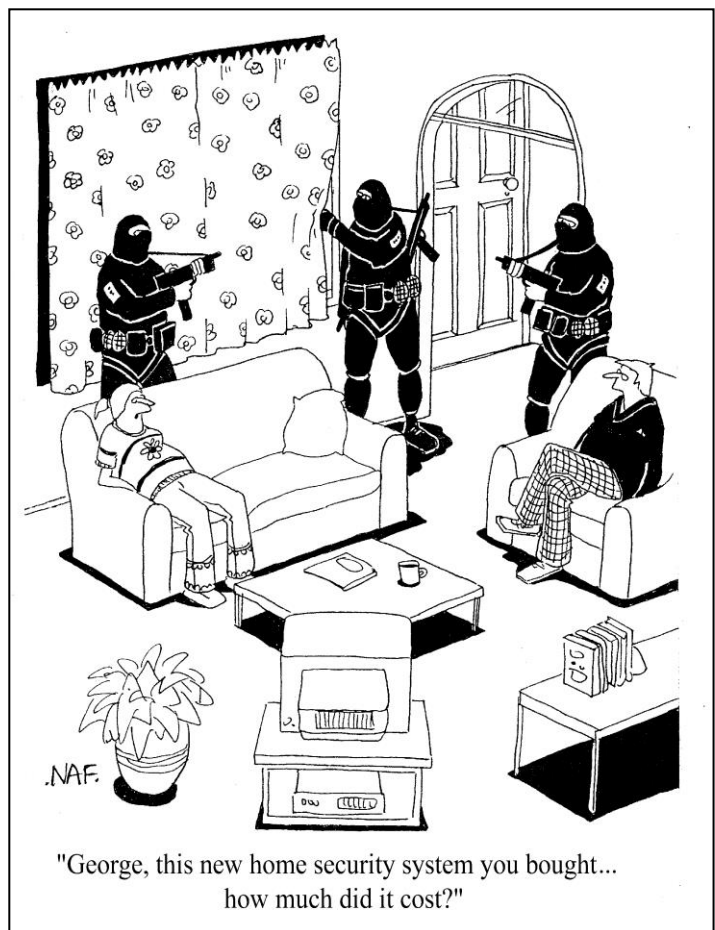


## Security – Are you alarmed?

Dome time ago at a regular meeting with a senior police officer in the Algarve we discussed crime prevention and public perception. His message to the public was “Don’t be Alarmed - be Aware”. A great slogan in the context of what we were discussing, but in part one of this two part article I am referring to “alarmed” as in the role of alarm companies here in the Algarve. To be more specific to ask the following questions: are alarms worth the investment, how do you decide what is required and what factors should you consider when purchasing?

As with financial planning and health care it is important before arriving at a solution to first carryout a thorough health check to determine your current position, decide your objectives and affordability of likely solutions. In security terms this is normally undertaken through an independent risk assessment and security survey. I emphasize the word “independent”, to ensure that all aspects are covered and avoiding any possible bias in the recommendations that arise from the study.

The first question to ask is – do you need an alarm? The factors that should be considered include: the level and nature of crime risk, the level of police coverage in your area and what crime prevention measures you already have in place. Basically an alarm system should compliment other security measures. It is not a crime prevention tool in itself, (except in terms of acting as some deterrence), but rather a means of alerting someone once an intruder has entered the grounds or property. **Put it another way, if theoretically no one could gain unauthorised access to your property then there would be no need for an alarm.** However, in practice this is seldom the case and statistics show that the chances of you being burgled or robbed inside a residence without an alarm are several



times higher than with one. This is particularly the case where a property is the only one in the road or block without an alarm.

So assuming the survey recommends an installation of an alarm, then what type do you need and where do you obtain one? Basically in the Algarve your choices are a) from a DIY store and install it yourself, b) on line shopping again with self installation, c) from door to door salesmen and, d) from engaging an alarm company. I would certainly not contemplate the first two options, as with all off-the-shelf solutions it would unlikely meet your objectives and there are seldom adequate support or maintenance services available. In many such cases people realise the mistake later on and have to resort to added expenditure to put things right. This also applies to option c) which is why police in many countries warn against purchasing alarm systems in this way without first obtaining alternative quotes.

In the Algarve there are a number of reputable specialist alarm companies. These have basically flourished because the number of burglaries is fairly high especially against foreign owned residences and there is a perception that crime is higher than what it actually is. Other factors are that some high profile crimes have given rise to feelings of insecurity, and that police, due to lack of resources, cannot provide the level of coverage many people would like.

There are really two types of alarm companies, those that simply sell alarms and others that provide both alarms and an emergency intervention (response) service. This is where personal security objectives are important. If you are absent most of the year and just wish to protect household contents, then this is very different to protecting yourself and family against the risk of intruders whilst you are there. Likewise the solutions are very different.

For some alarm companies the systems they sell involves the activation of an alarm when an intruder is detected and this is relayed to a mobile phone. It is then up to you (or the receiver) to judge whether this is a genuine alarm or alternatively a false alarm generated by something else, and decide what action to take. Do you call a neighbour or police? What happens if you are 5000 miles away? However most alarm companies do provide quality equipment and can arrange for this to be linked to alarm companies that have an emergency intervention service. In this way there maybe a greater choice of equipment, but it is essential to ensure that this is compatible with the latter's systems. It also can be argued that dealing with one company is easier than two.

So now we come to alarm and intervention companies. As they say the details are in the fine print and some are not printed at all. **The important thing to realise here is that the effectiveness of the equipment is only as good as the performance of the company in response to an emergency.** One major factor here is "speed of response". Does the company respond to all alarm signals or only self activated panic alarms. Do they call you first to check all is OK or respond anyway. At what stage are police called; immediately or after they have first checked the property themselves. Most importantly based on where you live, what is the likely response time??? These are only some of the things to consider in investing in an alarm system.

Part Two of this article will cover types of alarms, fine print details and other issues to be aware of before purchasing a system. Remember, however, your health check by arranging for an independent survey to be conducted beforehand as this will avoid problems and possibly added expenditure later on.