



An Extended Guide · No. 1863

Cameras Plus an Alarm — When to Add Monitoring and What It Costs

How cameras, alarms, and monitoring fit
— and the local rules to check first

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — it's about people, not just pictures

Before the gear, a word that matters more than any camera: with a business you are recording other people — customers, staff, people walking by — so where you point a camera, and whether it picks up sound, is as important as the picture. As a rule, keep cameras on general work and public areas, never on restrooms, changing areas, or anywhere someone expects privacy, and be very careful about recording audio. This guide gives you plain-English general information, not legal advice. For your own situation — especially anything to do with employees, audio, or the law — check with an attorney who knows Ohio. One more thing that's easy to miss: many Ohio towns require you to register a monitored alarm and will charge fees for too many false alarms — so before you sign anything, check with your own city, village, or township.

Cameras watch — an alarm acts. When to add both.

Cameras let you look and settle disputes, but they don't call for help on their own. An alarm does. This guide explains how cameras and an alarm fit together, what 'monitoring' really means, and the local rules most people never hear about until a bill arrives.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks get comfortable with the technology around their homes and businesses, patiently and in plain language. Alarms and monitoring get sold with a lot of pressure and fine print, so let's take the mystery out of it together.

There's no single right answer here — some businesses are well served by cameras alone, some want a full monitored alarm, and many land sensibly in between. We'll sort out which is which before you sign a thing.

★ Read the contract part before you sign the contract

Monitoring means a monthly bill and sometimes a local permit, and both catch people by surprise. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 before you sign, and I'll help you read what you're agreeing to — free, with nothing to sell you.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll make a sound decision and avoid the nasty surprises.

- ❑ CAMERAS record and deter and let you look; an ALARM detects an event and sounds or sends a signal; MONITORING is a company watching those signals 24/7.
- ❑ Cameras and an alarm work best together — the alarm raises the flag, the cameras show what's really happening.
- ❑ Professional monitoring means a real bill every month but someone always watching; self-monitoring is cheaper but it's on you to respond.
- ❑ Video verification — a monitor looking at the clip — can speed police and cut false dispatches.
- ❑ MANY Ohio towns require you to register a monitored alarm and charge false-alarm fees; the rules vary entirely by place.
- ❑ Before you sign a monitoring contract, check your city, village, or township about permits and false-alarm fees.

! One thing to do before you sign anything

Call your local police department or clerk and ask two questions: 'Do I need to register an alarm?' and 'What's the false-alarm fee rule?' The answers vary from town to town, and knowing them up front can change which system you choose.

Cameras, alarms, and monitoring are three different things

Most confusion here comes from blurring three separate ideas. Keep them apart and the whole subject gets clear.

Cameras

A camera records what happens and lets you look — live or afterward. It deters some trouble just by being seen, and it settles disputes. But a camera doesn't know when something's wrong, and it doesn't call anyone. It's a witness, not a guard.

An alarm

An alarm detects an event — a door or window opening, glass breaking, motion where there shouldn't be — and reacts: it sounds a siren and/or sends out a signal. It's the part of your system that actually notices trouble the moment it happens.

Monitoring

Monitoring is a company that watches your alarm's signals around the clock. When the alarm trips, they see it, and they dispatch police or fire or call you. Without monitoring, an alarm can still sound a siren, but nobody is guaranteed to be watching for the signal.

✓ The simple way to hold it in your head

Cameras LOOK, an alarm NOTICES, monitoring RESPONDS. A complete answer often uses all three, but you should know which job you're buying each time a salesperson talks.

How cameras and an alarm fit together

Cameras and an alarm aren't rivals — they're partners, and each covers the other's weak spot.

On its own, an alarm tells you **that** something happened but not **what** — was it a real break-in, a branch against a window, or the cat? On their own, cameras show you everything but shout at no one; they sit there recording while trouble unfolds. Put them together and the alarm raises the flag the instant a door is forced, and the cameras show you, or a monitor, exactly what's going on.

That pairing is the whole reason to think about them in one guide. When a camera clip can be tied to an alarm event, you get the best of both: an immediate alert and the proof of what triggered it. We'll see on the next pages how that same pairing — called video verification — can get police to you faster.

★ You may already have half of it

Plenty of businesses already have cameras and are only now weighing an alarm, or vice versa. Tell me what you've got and I'll help you see what adding the other piece really buys you — and whether you need it. Call (330) 200-8042.

What 24/7 monitoring really means

'Monitored' is a word that gets thrown around loosely. Here's what it actually involves.

With professional monitoring, your alarm is connected to a monitoring company's center. Their people — and their systems — watch for signals day and night, holidays included. When your alarm trips, they follow a set routine: often they try to reach you or a contact first to rule out a mistake, and if it looks real, they dispatch the police or fire department for you.

That's the value: at 3 a.m. when you're asleep, or on vacation two states away, someone is still watching and will act. The trade is that it's an ongoing service you pay for every month, and it ties you to a company and usually a contract. It's a real service with real worth — just go in knowing it's a recurring commitment, not a one-time purchase.

✓ **Monitoring is a service, not a gadget**

The alarm hardware you buy once. Monitoring you pay for as long as you want it watched. When you compare options, keep those two costs separate in your head so you can see what you're really signing up for.

Professional monitoring vs. self-monitoring

There are two honest ways to have an alarm 'watched'. Each suits a different kind of owner.

With **professional monitoring**, a company watches around the clock and dispatches for you. You pay a monthly fee and you don't have to be awake or available — that's exactly what you're paying for. It's the right call when nobody can reliably drop everything to respond, or when you simply want the peace of mind of a pro on watch.

With **self-monitoring**, the alarm sends alerts straight to your own phone. It's cheaper — often with little or no monthly fee — but the responding is entirely on you: you have to see the alert, judge it, and call the police yourself. That's fine for a hands-on owner who's usually reachable, and risky if you sleep hard, travel, or can't always look.

	Professional	Self-monitoring
Who responds	The company	You do
Monthly cost	A recurring fee	Little or none
Watches at 3 a.m.	Yes, always	Only if you wake

! Self-monitoring is only as good as you are

The money you save self-monitoring assumes you'll actually see the alert and act. Ask yourself honestly: at 3 a.m., on a busy Saturday, or on vacation — will I really see it and call? If the honest answer is 'maybe not', that's what professional monitoring is for.

Video verification — where cameras earn their place

This is the single best reason to pair cameras with a monitored alarm, and it's worth understanding plainly.

Normally, when an alarm trips, the monitoring company and the police can't see what caused it — so every trip gets treated with caution, and a lot of police runs turn out to be false. With **video verification**, the monitor can look at a short clip from your cameras the moment the alarm fires and see whether there's actually a person breaking in.

When a monitor can tell the police 'we can see someone inside right now', that's a confirmed crime in progress, and it often gets a faster response. Just as important, it cuts the false dispatches — when the clip clearly shows a shadow or a stray cat, no squad car gets sent for nothing. Fewer false runs is good for you, good for the police, and — as we'll see — easier on your wallet where false-alarm fees apply.

✓ This is the payoff of planning them together

Video verification only works if your cameras actually cover the spots your alarm protects, with a clear enough picture to tell a person from a shadow. That's a reason to plan the cameras and the alarm as one system, not two afterthoughts.

Local alarm permits and false-alarm fees

Here's the part the sales pitch almost never mentions, and the one most likely to cost you if you skip it.

Many Ohio cities, villages, and townships require you to **register or permit** a monitored alarm before it's hooked up to call the police or fire department. And many charge a **false-alarm fee** after a set number of false police or fire runs in a year — the idea being that repeated false alarms waste the department's time.

The catch is that there is **no single statewide rule**. Whether a permit is needed, how you register, how many false alarms you get before a fee, and how much that fee is — all of it varies entirely by municipality. Your town may require it; the next one over may not. I can't tell you your local rule, and neither can a national alarm company's salesperson, reliably — you have to check locally.

So, before you sign a monitoring contract, make one call: ask your **city or village police department, or your township** (the clerk's office can point you) two things — whether you need to register an alarm, and what the false-alarm ordinance says. It takes a few minutes and can change which system makes sense for you.

! Alarm permits and false-alarm fees are a local matter

Whether you must register a monitored alarm, and any false-alarm fees or the number of false runs allowed before they apply, are set by your local city, village, or township — not by the state — and they vary from place to place. Check with your own local authority (police department or clerk) before you sign a monitoring contract, and don't rely on a salesperson's general claim about 'the rules.' This is general information, not legal advice; rules change and every situation is different, so confirm the specifics with an attorney who knows Ohio before you rely on it.

Before you sign a monitoring contract

Monitoring contracts are where the pressure and the fine print live. A few minutes of care here saves years of regret.

Read the term and the cancellation rules, not just the monthly price. Monitoring agreements often run for a fixed number of years and can be awkward to get out of early. Find out what happens if you sell the business, move, or simply want to switch — and whether the monthly fee can rise during the term.

Ask what you actually own. Sometimes the equipment is yours, sometimes it's the company's and stops working fully if you leave. And confirm the local permit question we just covered — a good, honest company will know to raise it, but the responsibility to register is usually yours, not theirs.

★ Bring me the contract before you sign it

I'm happy to sit with you and read a monitoring agreement in plain English — the term, the cancellation, who owns the gear, and whether the local permit is handled. I've got no stake in who you pick, so I'll tell you straight. Call (330) 200-8042.

Two kinds of businesses, two sets of needs

Whether a monitored alarm is worth it depends a lot on what you're protecting and who's around to respond. The two cases look quite different.

If you run a customer-facing shop or storefront

You've got a till, stock on the floor, and busy open hours but empty nights. Your worry is the after-hours break-in and the daytime grab-and-run, and you're often not on-site when trouble comes.

- A monitored alarm covers the empty hours when no camera alert will wake you.
- Pair it with cameras for video verification so false trips don't pile up fees.
- Check your town's alarm permit and false-alarm rule before you sign.
- Lean professional if nobody can reliably respond to a 3 a.m. alert.

If you run an office, warehouse, or back-of-house

Bigger, quieter spaces, expensive stock or equipment, and long stretches with nobody there. Your worry is the overnight or weekend intrusion into a space that's normally empty.

- Monitoring matters most where the building sits empty for long stretches.
- Cover the real entry points so the alarm and cameras see the same spots.
- Self-monitoring can suit a hands-on owner who's always reachable.
- For who gets the alert and when, see the after-hours alerts guide.

★ Not sure it's worth the monthly fee?

That's the honest question, and it depends on your place and your nights. Tell me what you're protecting and who's around to respond, and I'll help you decide whether monitoring earns its keep for you. Call (330) 200-8042.

What it costs — in plain words

I won't quote you dollar figures — prices move and every company is different — but I can tell you the shape of the costs so nothing surprises you.

There are two kinds of cost. First, the **equipment and install**: the alarm panel, the sensors on your doors and windows, any motion detectors, and the labor to fit it. That's largely a one-time outlay, like buying cameras. Second, and this is the one people underweigh, the **recurring monthly fee** for professional monitoring — you pay it every month for as long as you want the service, and it adds up over the years of a contract.

Then there are costs that only show up if things go sideways: **false-alarm fees** where your town charges them, and early-termination charges if you break a contract. Self-monitoring trims the monthly fee way down but, remember, puts the responding on you. When you compare quotes, add up the monthly fee over the whole contract term, not just the first month — that's the number that tells the truth.

✓ Compare the whole term, not the teaser

A low first-month or 'free install' offer can hide a long, pricey contract. Multiply the monthly fee by the months you'd be locked in, and compare that total between companies. It's the only fair way to see what you're paying.

False alarms — the hidden cost worth avoiding

False alarms aren't just annoying. Where your town charges for them, they're a running cost — and they're largely preventable.

Most false alarms come from simple things: a door sensor knocked loose, a motion detector aimed at a heater vent or a hanging sign, a pet or a cleaning crew moving after hours, or a user who fumbles the code. Each one can send the police out for nothing, and in towns with a false-alarm ordinance, each one past your allowance can cost you a fee.

The fixes are mostly common sense: have the system set up carefully to begin with, tell the monitoring company about cleaners or anyone who'll be in after hours, keep sensors in good repair, and make sure everyone with the code knows how to use it. And this is where video verification earns its keep again — a monitor who can see the clip won't send police for a shadow.

! Repeated false alarms can cost you twice

Beyond the fees, a business that cries wolf too often can find the police slower to respond — or, in some places, unwilling to respond to an unverified alarm at all. Keeping your false alarms near zero protects both your wallet and your real emergencies.

Self-monitoring: alerts straight to your phone

If you go the self-monitoring route, the whole thing lives or dies on you seeing and acting on the alert. Plan for that honestly.

Self-monitoring sends a push alert to your phone when the alarm trips — and often a camera clip with it. For a hands-on owner who keeps their phone close, that can be genuinely enough: you see the alert, glance at the camera, and decide whether to call the police or drive over. No monthly monitoring fee, full control.

But be clear-eyed about the gaps. If your phone's on silent, the battery's dead, you're on a plane, or you simply sleep through it, there's no backstop — nobody else is watching. Many owners set up alerts to reach more than one person for exactly that reason. For how to handle those alerts well, and viewing the cameras safely from your phone, see the after-hours alerts guide and the guide on viewing from your phone.

✓ Don't let one dead phone be your whole security plan

If you self-monitor, route the alerts to at least two people, test them now and then, and be honest about the nights and trips when nobody will see them. If those gaps worry you, that's your sign to consider professional monitoring.

Do you actually need monitoring?

Not every business needs a monitored alarm. Here's how I'd think about whether it's worth it for you.

Monitoring earns its keep most when your building sits empty for long stretches, when what's inside is valuable or hard to replace, and when nobody can reliably respond to an alert in the middle of the night. If that's you, the monthly fee buys something real: someone always on watch.

If you're a tiny operation, you're on-site most hours, your valuables are minimal, and you're a light sleeper who keeps the phone close, cameras plus self-monitoring may serve you well for far less. There's no shame in either answer — the mistake is paying for a service you won't use, or skipping one you truly need to sleep at night.

★ Let's talk it through, no sales pressure

Because I don't sell alarms or monitoring and earn nothing either way, I'm a safe person to ask 'do I really need this?' Tell me about your business and your nights, and I'll give you my honest read. Call (330) 200-8042.

Choosing a monitoring company

If you decide on professional monitoring, the company you pick matters as much as the gear. A few things separate the good from the pushy.

- **Clear, written terms** — the length, the monthly fee, how to cancel, all in plain language you can read before you sign.
- **No high-pressure, same-day-only deals.** A company worth hiring will let you sleep on it.
- **Honest about the local permit** — they raise the registration and false-alarm question rather than letting you find out the hard way.
- **Supports video verification** if you have or plan cameras, so false dispatches stay low.
- **Local reputation you can check** — other owners in your area who'll tell you how the company actually responds.

✓ Walk away from pressure

The single biggest red flag in this business is a salesperson who needs your signature today or the deal 'disappears'. Real security is a years-long relationship. Anyone rushing you is managing their quota, not your safety.

Keeping the alarm reachable when it matters

An alarm is only useful if its signal gets out during the very trouble it's meant to catch. Plan for the bad moment, not the calm one.

A monitored alarm talks to the monitoring company over your internet or a cellular connection. Think about what happens if the power or the internet goes down — which can happen in a storm, or because an intruder cuts it on purpose. A good system has a backup battery and often a cellular path so the signal still gets out when the lights are off.

The same goes for your cameras feeding video verification: if they lose power the moment the break-in happens, there's nothing to verify. A small backup power source for the alarm panel, the network gear, and the recorder keeps a brief outage from erasing the moment you cared about. We cover keeping the camera side healthy in the maintenance guide.

! Ask how the signal gets out if the power's cut

A system that only phones home over your internet goes dark the moment the power or line is cut — which is exactly when a smart intruder cuts it. Ask your installer about a backup battery and a cellular path, and don't assume it's included.

A simple decision checklist

Work through this before you sign anything, and you'll choose with open eyes.

- ☐ I know the difference between cameras, an alarm, and monitoring.
- ☐ I've decided whether I need an alarm at all, and what it should cover.
- ☐ I've weighed professional monitoring against self-monitoring honestly.
- ☐ I've asked whether video verification is supported, if I have cameras.
- ☐ I've called my city, village, or township about an alarm permit.
- ☐ I've asked about the false-alarm ordinance and any fees.
- ☐ I've read the contract term, the monthly fee, and how to cancel.
- ☐ I've asked how the alarm signal gets out if the power or internet fails.

✓ Make the two phone calls first

Before any salesperson comes out, call your local authority about the permit and false-alarm rule. Walking into the sales conversation already knowing your town's rules puts you in charge of it.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable slip-ups cause most alarm-and-monitoring regret. Now you'll see them coming.

- **Confusing cameras with an alarm** — assuming the cameras will 'call someone' when they only record.
- **Skipping the local permit check**, then meeting the false-alarm fee the hard way.
- **Signing on pressure** — a long contract agreed to in a rush to grab a 'today only' deal.
- **Underweighting the monthly fee**, pricing only the gear and forgetting it's a recurring bill.
- **Self-monitoring you won't actually watch**, so the alert arrives and no one ever sees it.
- **No backup path**, so the signal dies the moment the power or internet is cut.

! The expensive mistake

The costliest error isn't picking the wrong company — it's assuming your cameras are an alarm, finding out they never called for help, and only then learning the break-in went unanswered. Know which job each piece does.

Questions to ask before you sign

Whether you're talking to an alarm company or to me, these questions get you a fair deal and no surprises.

Q: What's the monthly fee, the term, and how do I cancel?

You want all three in writing before you sign. Multiply the monthly fee by the full term to see the real cost, and make sure you understand the cancellation and what happens if you sell or move.

Q: Do I need a local alarm permit, and what's the false-alarm rule?

A good company will flag this, but the duty to register is usually yours. Don't take a general answer — confirm it yourself with your city, village, or township, because it varies entirely by place.

Q: Do you support video verification with my cameras?

If you have or plan cameras, verification can speed police and cut false dispatches. Ask whether their monitoring can view a clip when the alarm trips, and what's needed to connect it.

Q: How does the alarm reach you if the power or internet is cut?

The answer should mention a backup battery and usually a cellular path. A system that only talks over your internet goes silent the moment the line is cut — which is exactly when it matters most.

✓ There's no silly question

If an alarm salesperson gets vague or impatient when you ask about the contract, the permit, or the backup path, that's a reason to slow down, not to sign. A plain answer is the least you should expect.

Putting it together

Pull the pieces into one sensible picture and the decision gets a lot calmer.

Start with your cameras for looking, deterring, and settling disputes. Add an alarm if you've got valuable things and empty hours that the cameras alone won't protect. Then decide how the alarm gets watched: **professional monitoring** if nobody can reliably respond, or **self-monitoring** if you're hands-on and always reachable. If you have cameras and an alarm both, ask for video verification to tie them together.

And wrapped around all of it: make the two local phone calls about the permit and the false-alarm rule before you sign, read the whole contract, and confirm the alarm can still call out when the power's down. Do those and you've made a decision you can live with — not one a salesperson made for you.

★ Let's build your plan together

Tell me what you're protecting, who's around to respond, and your town, and I'll help you put cameras, an alarm, and monitoring into one sensible plan — with nothing to sell you and no pressure. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from owners weighing an alarm and monitoring, answered plainly.

Q: Do my cameras already call the police if there's a break-in?

No — that's the big misunderstanding. Cameras record and let you look, but they don't call anyone on their own. For something to actually respond you need an alarm, and to have it watched around the clock you need monitoring.

Q: Do I really need professional monitoring, or can I self-monitor?

It depends on whether you'll reliably see and act on an alert. If your building sits empty and nobody can respond at 3 a.m., professional monitoring buys real peace of mind. If you're hands-on and always reachable, self-monitoring can serve you for far less.

Q: Do I need a permit for my alarm in Ohio?

Maybe — it depends entirely on your city, village, or township, and there's no single statewide rule. Many places require you to register a monitored alarm and charge fees for too many false alarms. Call your local police department or clerk and ask before you sign.

Q: How do I keep from getting hit with false-alarm fees?

Set the system up carefully, keep sensors in good repair, tell the monitoring company about cleaners or after-hours staff, and make sure everyone knows the code. Video verification helps too, by stopping the police being sent for a shadow.

★ Still weighing it up?

Alarms and monitoring come with a lot of pressure and fine print, and that's exactly where a neutral second opinion helps most. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you decide with a clear head.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made deciding on an alarm and monitoring feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything — that's what the guide is for.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your place of business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a licensed electrician or low-voltage contractor — for in-wall wiring or panel work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro and make sure it all works together.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Cameras vs. Alarm vs. Monitoring

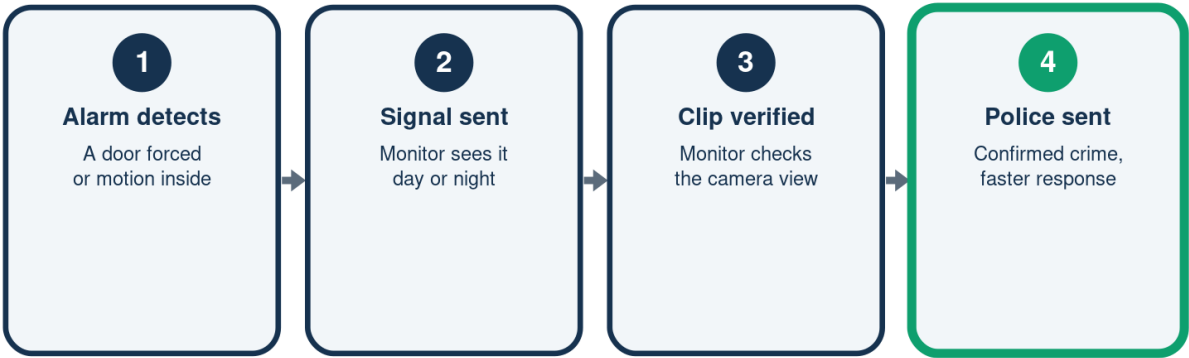
Three different jobs -- a good plan often uses all three

	What it does	What it won't
Cameras	Record and look	Call for help
An alarm	Detect, sound	Watch itself
Monitoring	Watch 24/7	Come for free

Cameras LOOK, an alarm NOTICES, monitoring RESPONDS.

What Happens When the Alarm Trips

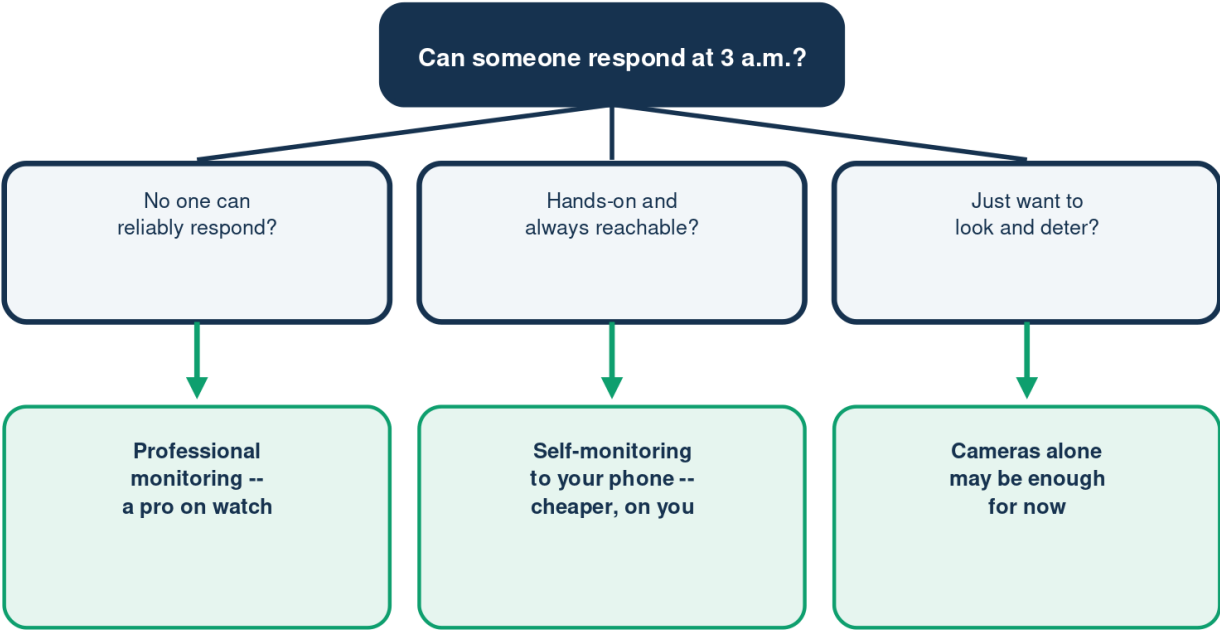
How video verification can speed the right response



A verified clip speeds real response and cuts false dispatches.

How Should the Alarm Be Watched?

Be honest about who can respond, and when



Either way, check your town's alarm permit and false-alarm rule first.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Professional vs. Self-Monitoring

The honest trade between cost and who responds

	Professional	Self-monitoring
Who responds	The company	You do
Monthly cost	A recurring fee	Little or none
At 3 a.m.	Always watched	Only if you wake
Best for	Empty buildings	Hands-on owners

Self-monitoring saves money only if you truly see and act on alerts.



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You just have to remember you can call.

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Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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