

Remote control: Travelers can keep an eye on home

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This photo released by Protection One shows how your cell home can be used as a home security monitor.(AP Photo/Protection One)

This holiday season, many travelers will be able to keep a close eye on home. Thanks to new security system technology, including live video feed, you can monitor everything from the front door to the sump pump from hundreds of miles away.

"You can see anything that's going on from anywhere in the world," said

Jay Park of Park Place Installations in Buffalo, N.Y.

Homeowners can set the new alarm systems to send text messages or e-mails when something goes wrong at home.

Eric Harper, marketing director of the Lexington, Ky.-based Elan Home Systems, said a customer was on vacation recently when he got a message that his front door was open. He confirmed it by going online and pulling up feed from a camera by that door. A neighbor followed up, discovering that the pet sitter had not pulled the door firmly shut and it blew open in a storm.

New York City resident Eli Karp said he uses his cell phone to check his house about 10 times a day. His HomeLogic alarm system offers live video feed from inside the house, and Karp also can disarm the security system by phone to let in workers or delivery people.

"It's a time saver," he said. "It's extra peace of mind."

Homeowners can monitor the weather, as well as heating and cooling units and other household systems while traveling, said Richard Ginsburg, president of Protection One, based in Lawrence, Kan. Cameras show whether it's snowing or raining on the driveway, so you can decide whether to call a plowing service, he said.

Other homeowners set their systems to alert them if the sump pump or furnace stops working, developments that could lead to water damage from flooding or frozen pipes.

Installation costs for the new technology range from \$150 to \$600 depending on whether the residence has an existing security system. Monthly monitoring fees are between \$15 and \$40.

Do-it-yourself systems also are available, said Julie Strietelmeier, editor of The-gadgeteer.com, a Web site that reviews high-tech products. Prices vary depending on the number of cameras installed, she said. A startup kit would cost around \$330 plus monthly monitoring fees.

Such systems - professional and DIY - have a lot of advantages, she said.

"I think it's useful if you're working during the day and you want to see what's going on at your house," said Strietelmeier from her home office in Columbus, Ind. "There's some really hardcore systems. You can do almost anything."

Homeowners with alarm systems usually recoup some of the costs with discounts on their insurance premiums, according to insurance professionals.

During the holidays, many clients use the system to receive packages, Harper said. Homeowners will leave a note asking the delivery person to phone them; when they receive the call, they can use the security cameras to verify that the caller is a delivery person, and remotely open the garage door or unlock the front door.

The [security system](#) also can send an alert upon the arrival of a handyman or cleaning person. The homeowner can keep track of what rooms the person enters and how long they are in the home.

Parents can use the system to keep track of the comings and goings of children, and can arrange to be alerted if someone opens the liquor cupboard or medicine cabinet.

The systems also can be programmed to turn on lights when you arrive home, or adjust the home's temperature before your arrival.

Customers who use the systems to control heating, cooling and lights may see savings in their energy bills, said Don Boerema, chief marketing officer of ADT Security Services in West Palm Beach, Fla.

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