

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

Transcript (recorded and translated by artificial intelligence software, and edited by Margaret Callahan)

I've worked for Hershey's mill in the security department for last 26 years. I've been director of security here for 23 years, so I go back a little way before some of the villagers were even here. I want to talk to you about the alarm systems and the monitoring and what's taking place here over the next year. When your house was built, they had an alarm system installed in the house that was tied into your smoke detectors and the two panic buttons you have in your house, there's one by the front door (little red button about this high), and one in your master bedroom. Back then, the only smoke detectors that were required by code was one in the hallway and one in the master bedroom. If you had a basement, there was one in the basement. If you had a loft, there was one in the loft.

Hershey's Mill Security monitored those alarms back when computers were still using DOS programming, and there was no Windows, 10, 11, XP, anything like that, and it was as a service to the Hershey's Mill residents.

Since that time, a lot more houses have been added. A lot more alarms (per house) have been added due to township code. And obviously technology has advanced. Our monitoring technology hasn't kept up with the changes in computer operating systems. We were doing okay until about 2017 or 2018 when Verizon decided that they were going to stop using copper lines and they were going to switch completely to FIOS.

The way your alarm panel works is if you set off a smoke detector or you press a panic button, your alarm panel is activated and then it has the ability to seize your home phone line, which up until about 2017 was a copper phone line. So, if someone was on the phone somewhere else in the house, it would cut them off, and it would dial and send an alarm down to us at Security, to our receivers, and then it would pop up on our computer screen. We would try to call you for about 90 seconds. If we couldn't get a hold of you, we'd call 911, and we'd come up to the house. When the switch to FiOS happened, we were alerted by other alarm companies that we were going to have an issue with our alarm systems because most of them are outdated, and even the ones that aren't outdated are having issues using FiOS to send an alarm communication.

The short of it is, when you press a panic button or smoke detector goes off, it creates a little packet of information. The FiOS communication lines are so fast, that packet of information can't stay together and it starts to break apart from point A to point B, to the point that when it reaches the alarm receiver, the alarm receiver won't know where it came from, or what type of alarm it is.

As a result, I worked with Verizon consultants who came back and said that we should use what's called a cellular communicator with our alarm panels. In short, it's a cell phone for

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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your alarm panel, so no more home phone line. When the alarm is activated, it activates the little cell phone it has built inside, and it will send that signal out to the alarm receivers using the cellular communicator. At the time, back in 2017 it was about \$400 per communicator and about \$40 a month. So, we decided to hold off and see what happened with the new FIOS lines. Within a couple of months, we had 400 alarm panels stop communicating altogether within Hershey's Mill, therefore, we contracted with a security company out of Michigan to help. So, your alarms now, when you activate an alarm, it goes to a receiver located in Michigan, but it instantaneously pops up on our computer screen at the Security gatehouse. The issue since then, is that we've had to go back to these panels, and reprogram them with 800 numbers. We kept running into communication issues and the Michigan company would keep giving us band-aids to fix the issues.

Around the middle to end of last year, we began seeing alarm panels, especially the type that are found in Franklin as well as about 1000 homes total in Hershey's Mill have communication issues. Your panels send Security a communication test every week at the same time, on the same day. And if it doesn't, our computer says, "Hey, you know, Margaret's test didn't come in at two o'clock on Wednesday". We would then send out a repair report to your Council and CSK. As a result of that, we had most alarm panels fail a communication test more than one time (or more) over the course of the last few months of 2024. There's no rhyme or reason for it. The next week it would fine, or fine for five more weeks, and then it might fail again. I worked with the company in Michigan and sent them the times these tests were supposed to take place. They sent me back audio recordings of the communication from your panel to the receiver, and we could hear the static. We could hear the issues in the communication that are caused by FIOS.

So, where we're at right now is there's no more band-aids to fix this. We cannot use FIOS or our home phone lines any longer to reliably send communications to us at Security, and we don't have the ability to receive them reliably anymore. Most alarm companies, several years ago, switched like, let's say, a protection bureau. They went back to all of their customers, the 1000s that they have, and put them all on cellular communicators. Years ago, we just kept riding out with FiOS as long as we could, and we're to a point where we can't keep receiving these communications down at Security any longer. So, at some point in 2026 we're going to stop monitoring the alarms here in Hershey's Mill and therefore, the Security Committee has looked into other options for residents here with the alarm panels, and as far as monitoring goes and what the township is going to require, because we've also not kept up with township code.

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Township code states that a monitored alarm system needs to be tested annually. So once a year, someone needs to be in there testing every smoke detector, every panic button. The average village has been testing about every four years. That's not meeting township code, and that's something that's going to start getting enforced next year (2026). They've been nice and kind of given us a little bit of a pass these last two, three years with the new inspectors. The other issue that we have with our alarm systems right now is that we only have one alarm contractor who's willing to come in and do work on these systems, and the main reason is liability, because, let's use an ADT as an example. If ADT came in and they maintained your alarm panel, and they didn't work on it and there was an issue with it, but they don't monitor it, they don't know there's an issue with it. And if there's a fire at your house, if you fall and your panic button didn't work, or a different part of your system didn't work, they would be held liable. Companies do not want to come in here and do work on our systems if they're not monitoring the system to know when an issue arises.

We've dropped from three contractors over the last few years to one contractor who will come in. The Security Committee has contacted over 30 different alarm contractors in our region, and only one was willing to come in and do work in Hershey's Mill, other than the one we use right now, West Chester security, and that company was going to charge 50% more and it averaged two weeks before they came in to do the work, they backed out for liability reasons. The company we have in here now is just a father and son operation. Father fell off a ladder working on an alarm system about a year and a half ago, and fractured his skull. He was out for four months, and in that time, there were homes in Hershey's Mill that went up for sale needed used occupancy permits from the township, and they couldn't get extra smoke detectors wired into the house to meet code to get that permit, because the only contractor who could do the work here was laid up. This is not a long term solution for us and it's another reason that we need to take action.

And the last thing here is the township. The township, like I said, requires annual testing moving forward. And the other thing is, with that, they require that to bring everything up to code. So, our alarm systems can't have smoke detectors more than 10 years old. Most of the smoke detectors in Hershey Mill are more than 10 years old. So, when that testing occurs at the very latest, if we haven't put new systems in, then they're going to know that we don't have new systems in, and they're going to require a system that meets code. So the Security Committee, like I said, we've been working on this for last two or three years, and we've met with the township.

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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Therefore, we are dealing with 1) FiOS communication issues, 2) one small company willing to maintain our alarms, and 3) the township requirements. We looked at possible solutions for villages. Now keep in mind, this is a Village decision. It is not a Master Association decision, because your covenants state that the village is responsible for the testing, maintenance and replacement of the alarm panels. This is not like the Verizon contract. We can't come in and tell you have to do A, B or C. I've been to 21 village Council meetings, and you're about my seventh open residents meeting so far, to explain what the solutions are available.

The Security Committee met with the township as well as some of the board of directors and Ed McFalls to see what the township is going to require of us. And the rules for us are no different than the rules for rest of East Goshen Township.

We have two ways forward. One is that we can do the minimum amount required by the township, which we are referring to as 'the Home Depot route'. The main township requirement is that one smoke detector goes off, then they all have to go off. That's one of the primary codes that needs to be met. Home Depot/Lowe's, they sell smoke detectors that are interconnected (talk with each other). If one goes off, they all go off. What the township would require if we were to go that route, would be that we have someone come in, install that system and remove the existing system. It would not be monitored. There would be no panic buttons. There would be no monitoring of the alarms. It would simply be smoke detectors in the house designed to get you out of the house if there was an emergency. A permit would be needed for this, because we had permits for the systems that went into your house, so the township would come in and inspect that the smoke detectors meet code, and then that would be the end of it. There would be no annual testing. There would be no further involvement from the township until you went to sell your house. There'd also be no monitoring.

The other option is to continue with a monitor system, but it would not be monitored by Hershey's Mill Security. It would be monitored by an outside company that would also provide annual testing that's necessary for the township code.

We currently have six requests for proposals out to six different companies, some national, some regional, asking them to provide the same type of service that Hershey's Mill receives right now. So, it's what we would call life safety devices, which includes, your smoke detectors, your panic buttons, and a carbon monoxide detector (if it's required by the township). And what that would do is this company would come in, they would install a new system, so one that meets code, because one way or another, you all need new

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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systems that bring you up to code. The township will not let us keep what we have indefinitely because it is out of date, and they've been nice not to enforce that on us so far.

So, this company would come in, put in a new system, take out your old system. They would monitor your devices, so your panic buttons, your smoke detectors. They would put in a system that uses a cellular communicator. It's built in, and it would use what we would call Wi-Fi backups, so the unit connects to your home's Wi-Fi, and it would determine what the fastest form of communication would be. If it's a cellular communicator, it can connect to any of the towers, Verizon, T Mobile, AT&T. It's going to determine in an instant the fastest mode of communication and send a signal that way.

How it works - - when you press a panic button, or when a smoke detector goes off, it goes to their monitoring station. These companies have what's called UL license monitoring stations. So, if a tornado comes through and knocks out their station, it goes to a backup station. In Texas, or Colorado, they have people there, 24 hours a day, multiple people monitoring the lines and so forth.

With our current set up and manpower, the larger the community got, the harder and more spread out we were trying to keep up with the needs of the community. Currently, if we have a cardiac arrest 911 call. We take both people out of the office, and we respond to that call, because doing CPR and using the AED correctly is more important than the 20 minutes that we're going to be gone from the main gate. It's a nice service that we've been offering, but it's not something that we can continue to offer safely and reliably.

Right now, if you press the panic button, we will get it. If an ADT or another company comes in, you press your button, it would go to their monitoring station. They would do the same thing that we do now. They would wait for 90 seconds and try to contact you. If no one was there, and they couldn't get a hold of anyone. They would call 911, I want to point out, and I'd like you to make sure that you listen closely to this, because it's important, our service with security, our response, will NOT change, even if we are not monitoring the alarm. We will still be notified that there is a 911 call alert/alarm at your house even if the alarm does not pop up on our computer screen. We will respond to your house as quickly as we currently respond. There are other specialty alarms Security respond to, like low temperature alarms. If you're away during the winter time temperature drops below 45 degrees in your house, we get an alarm. Quite a few people in Hershey mill have water sensors. So, if there's water on the floor that knocks two of the four sensors, we get an alarm. If there's an issue with the batteries, we get an alarm. So, we respond to things other than just the 911, emergencies. So with the new company, whichever one is chosen for the

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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monitoring, if they get an alarm like that, they'll still try to call your house, just like we do, but then they'll call Security next, and we will respond to your house just like we do now for the same alarms that we respond to now, so the response from security will not change. What's changing is who receives that that alarm on their computer screen.

So, like I said, we have the proposals out. The Security Committee hopes to hear back about those proposals, within the next week to week and a half, we're going to meet together, go over the proposals, and then meet with all the villages that wanted to continue with a monitored system, and try to pick one proposal to move forward with.

We will have a recommendation so the villages that want to move forward with a monitored system. Then we're going to try to get kind of an economy of scale, and all jump on it together. And we're looking to get a five or seven- or 10-year contract out of this with the company, much like we did with Verizon. The way that would work is they will bill the village directly for what we would call a base service. So, like with Verizon right now you all get a base speed of internet, cable TV package and phone line. So, we're looking for the same type of thing from these alarm companies, base package that covers life safety alarms. If you as a homeowner now with Verizon wanted HBO or add some set top boxes or something else, then Verizon bills you individually for that, and they build a village for the base package. Same thing, if you want to add a burglar alarm system or other sensors or motion sensors or whatever it is to your system that they install, they would bill a village for the base package, and then they would build you directly for the add ons. So these new systems are expandable. It's touch screen, it's Bluetooth. You can tie cameras into it. So at any rate, where we're at right now is we'll get these RFPs back. We'll meet with the villages and then see what they want to do. If the village chooses to go a non-monitored route, like the Home Depot type of alarms, then there's usually required to be a vote that the villages will back away from the alarms, and then the responsibility of the alarms will fall on the homeowners, and then it's up to each individual homeowner to move forward with a whether it be a monitored system or the Home Depot type system that will meet the requirements of the township.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Would we have had this problem if we stayed with Comcast?

If you had FiOS or Comcast, high speed internet and phone service, we'd still have the same problem, whether it's Comcast or Verizon. The issue was pulling the copper.

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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When you say alarm, does that mean fire and panic buttons that this company would be monitored?

Yes. So the question is, when I say alarms, do I mean panic and smoke detectors. So yes, the company would be monitoring the smoke detectors, the panic alarms, the maintenance ones, like if there's a low battery or something like that, it's a wireless system. So, you have wireless smoke detectors, you could add medical alarms or things like that to it. But yeah, the security committee and the board have asked for these companies to quote us on Apples to Apples, what we have now that's covered. We're trying to find the lowest common denominator here, which is smoke detectors, panic buttons. And then, if the township requires a CO two detector, that would be included.

How often are people able and how often do they use them (panic buttons)?

Okay, so grandkids like to use the panic buttons a lot. Always have. So 2024, on average, there were three to four panic buttons received by us per month. These were actual emergencies we got to the house and 911 needed to take the person to the hospital. We had one over the weekend. We had both a panic button on this past Saturday where the person crawled to the button and was barely able to move by the time we got there. And we had a smoke alarm that went off on Sunday, and our officer got to the house, put the fire out on the stove, and then, as the woman began to pass out, caught her and put her on the ground. They took her to the hospital. So that was in Glenwood village. Glenwood village has written a letter to the board of commendation, because that fire would have spread had he not gotten there and put that fire out, which is important again, to state our response remains the same. If someone else monitored that alarm, we still would have been there in that time.

You sent bids to 6 companies. What is the range of costs coming in?

It's too early for us to publicly state any range. What I will say is one company that's familiar with Hershey Mill gave us just a very preliminary numbers. So their estimate, and again, this is just an estimate. By a time you factor in a new system with let's say the average house in Franklin needs four smoke detectors, plus the township is going to charge us for a permit. So a new system is going to run about \$1,000 per house. To give you

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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comparison, Kennett village just finished putting some systems in, and it's not as nice a system. It's not touch screen, it's not Bluetooth capable. And they paid \$1,000 or more per house. And then you're looking at the cost for them to monitor the systems and to come in and test the system annually, physically come in the house, schedule, test the smoke detectors, the buttons, and then send proof of testing certificates to the township. That total comes to about \$25 a month. I'll give you a comparison right now. Back around 2017 Zepher village decided to install cellular communicators in all of their alarm panels and bypass the FiOS. And they haven't had issues with that. They are paying \$30 a month just for the cellular communicator, not for additional monitoring, so they're actually going down in cost.

Yeah, just to be clear, if we went with the Home Depot style, there would be no monitoring except for the homeowner. And typically, in a single family home, that means there'd be an audible alarm outside the house to the neighborhood, correct? So, in this case, there'd be no audible alarm outside the house, that's not very safe for your neighbors. Then that's up to each village to determine what's safe for them or their neighbors. Each village needs to pick a path – monitored or unmonitored. It can't be a mixture.

Do we pay now for monitoring?

So great question, do we pay now for monitoring? It's in our security budget there. Again, when we started doing this, there were hundreds fewer homes than there are now, and technology wasn't so far down the path as it was now, and it was just kind of an extra service. And just to give you an idea, this last year alone, we sent out 1500 repair reports for alarms. We're just getting inundated because they're old alarm systems. So right now, to give you an idea for security, to monitor your system, it's like about \$1 a month a house, okay? But it's not a line item. It's just part of our budget, like manpower and what we do now, a large part of that is that responding is something we're still going to be doing. I'd love to say, "Hey, everyone, you get to save \$1 a month a house", but the reality is, fuel costs go up. Utilities have gone up. Insurance has gone up. So while maybe we jump down \$1 a month per house for, you know, manpower, let's say you're not going to actually see it passed on in the Master Association budget, because it's so small, it's going to get eaten up by other things. So this \$30 would be added on to each Village's budget. Yes, \$30 (early estimates) per month, per house,

Marc Fraser – Director of Security – Alarm

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This isn't going to take place before 2026 because villages need to be able to have time to put it in next year's budget. No village is budgeted for this for this year. Now, my hope is that most villages have budgeted and reserved to have alarm panels replaced, because that should be done, or the alarm systems that should be done every 10 years. So just like you know, roofs or paving or other things, alarms. A lot of villages have reserves for the alarm system. So, they're not starting at Hey, it's going to be \$1,000 we're starting from scratch. They already have some in reserves. Not all villages, but some do.

The cellular systems....what about those that have weak signals? We are aware of pockets of weak signals and the companies will need to explain how they will deal with that issue (antennas, etc.).

Transcribed by Otter AI (artificial intelligence) <https://otter.ai> and interpreted by Margaret Callahan - as best I could.