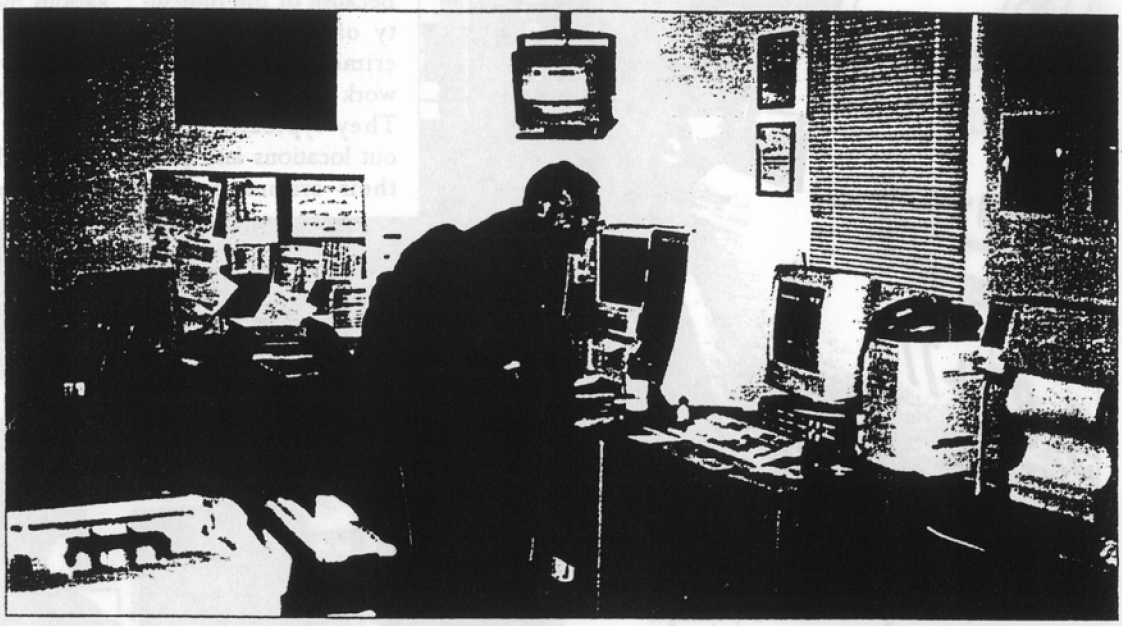
HCN
HEAVY CONSTRUCTION NEWS
OCTOBER 1999 $8.00

Big brother is *listening*

By Editor Russ Noble

Security of equipment is a big concern for many construction companies these days as more and more pieces of expensive machinery become the target of thieves and ultimately, the subject of investigations by police authorities across the country.

By the very nature of the fact that many pieces of equipment are left unprotected on job sites when not in use, they become vulnerable. Even equipment stored in yards at dealerships or field compounds have gone missing during off hours.



Joe Wilson of Sonitrol Security Systems uses one of the company's monitoring stations to check out what's happening at a customer's site.

To help combat this costly loss of machines and other tools, contractors and equipment suppliers alike are going to great measures to protect their investments.

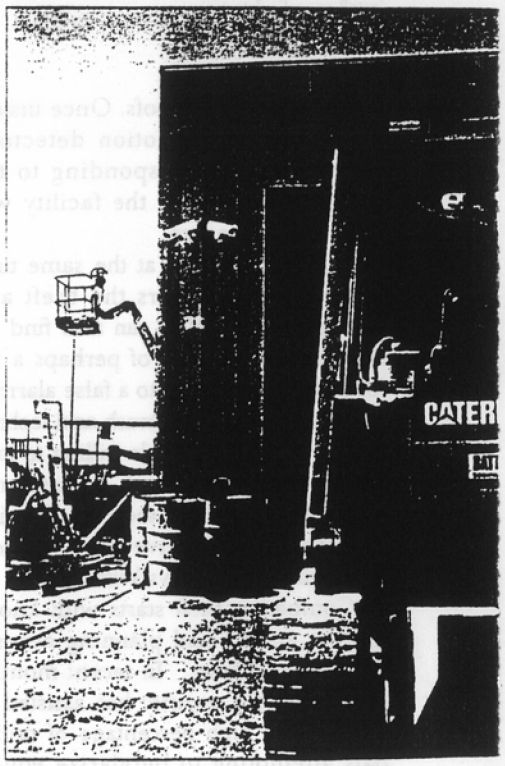
One system that has become very popular with equipment owners, suppliers, and the police, is an audio listening system that works in harmony with remote video surveillance cameras to not only see what's going on, but to actually listen in on any burglar in action.

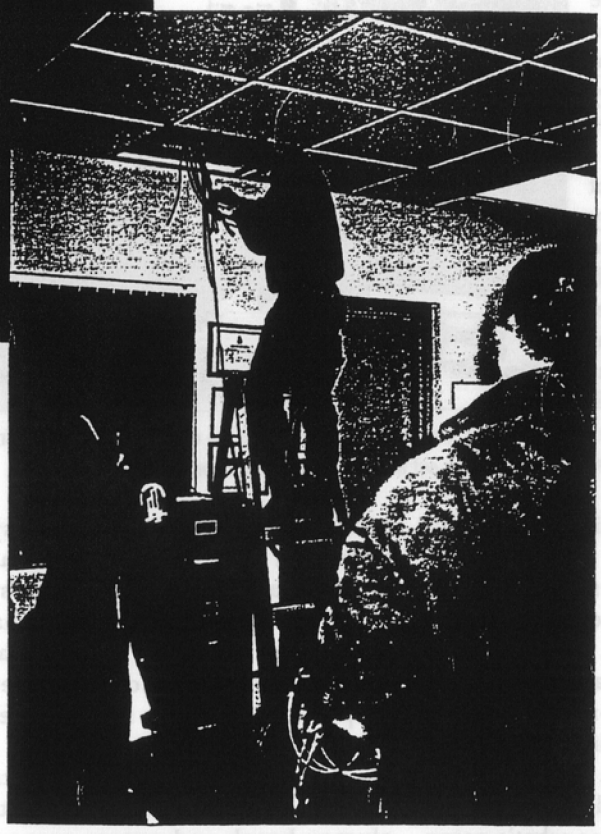
Joe Wilson, vice-president, Canadian Operations, Sonitrol Security Systems, Mississauga, Ont., says his company's technology permits operators to "listen in" and then transmit the audio recording live to the police. As well, video photos of the burglars can be faxed to the police dispatcher or to any patrol car equipped with a fax machine.

By contrast to conventional systems such as "motion sensors" and "glass break detectors," Wilson's system gives a true picture of what's happening when an alarm sounds. Many other systems could have been tripped by a mouse or something else just as harmless.

Wilson explains that burglar tactics have rapidly outdistanced the clumsy break-and-enters common only five years ago and as a result, have rendered many conventional security system all but obsolete.

Today, felons familiar with the failings of these systems, which may include high tech access controls and glass break detectors mentioned earlier, often bypass normal modes of entry by doors and windows. Instead, they execute Topkapi manoeuvers, crawling through ventilation shafts or





Photos above and left show typical video installations while photo at right shows technician preparing to install an audio detector.

chopping holes in roofs. Once inside, they may set off motion detectors. However, police responding to the alarm and checking the facility will often find all secure.

Adding to injury, at the same time as the firm discovers the theft and damage to its roof, it can also find it's receiving notification of perhaps a fee for police responding to a false alarm.

Against the smart, brash and technologically adapt criminals willing to take enormous risk for high stakes, only detailed, imaginative security planning and the most effective counter measures will succeed, says Wilson.

Combating theft starts with knowing the enemy and planning accordingly, says Wilson. In recent months, Sonitrol audio security has assisted in capturing a high percentage of criminals attempting to burglarize equipment owners and suppliers. The typical profile of those apprehended includes: mid-20s to 30s, highly articulate with a relatively high education level, from a middle class background, and usually affiliated to one or more semi-organized kinds of crime. Because of the difficulty of these kinds of crimes, thieves often work in pairs or teams. They typically scout out locations and plan their crimes over a period of weeks or months.

While all the elements that contribute to true security are too numerous for Wilson to explain here, he does give some lesser-known facts that may help dealers and contractors plan their defense tactics.

For improved protection, move the perimeter of security out and beyond the building or fences it is intended to protect. Measures include remote TV surveillance for adjacent areas after hours. Not infrequently, Wilson's firm puts audio sensors into premises of clients' neighbours in multi-tenant facilities to prevent thieves from breaking in through adjoining walls or fences without being detected.

When burglars began to cut telephone lines to prevent alarms from being sent to monitoring stations, cellular back-ups were introduced to the alarm system. Now, criminals are using various means to cut the power to targeted facilities intermittently, to deplete the reserves of cellular back-ups used for security. The solution: two, 16-hour batteries, compared to the average four-hour battery, have proven successful in defeating this tactic.

Detection is one thing, but getting the message of an intrusion to police is another. To answer this vital need, Sonitrol's ultra-secure central station on Britannia Road in Mississauga is manned 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Operators constantly monitor high-level digital audio/video communications systems to pick-up any sounds and sights of an intrusion. In the event the audio system detects pre-entry noises that an intrusion is about to take place, such as tampering with doors or windows, the actual sounds of the break-in are immediately fed live to the police who can listen to the audio tape, determine that it is not a false alarm and provide a response.

Joe Wilson is convinced his company's type of system is the only way for security-conscious companies to go and that conventional alarm systems mentioned earlier will be replaced with systems that provide both audio and video verification.

"This will significantly increase apprehension and thereby reduce burglary attempts. False alarms will be a thing of the past." says Wilson. HCN