

Responsibility of freedom

You probably have heard about the rash of burglaries at rural area homes over the past few months here in Washington County. These scummy thieves are ransacking homes and taking not just electronics and other valuables but also hauling out complete gun safes filled with firearms and ammunition.

Since we have lived 10 miles from Brenham for 12 years, I have always been worried about a break in at our rural homestead. With help from 911 at least 10 minutes away we all need to be able to protect ourselves and not rely on a phone call from the alarm company like in the stupid Broadview Security commercials.

Nothing beats quick access to a 12-gauge riot shotgun loaded with 3-inch magnum shells of 00-Buckshot with a tactical Surefire light mounted on the seven-shot stock accompanied by a bandoleer holding another 20 rounds.

It's always better to prevent bad things from happening compared to the time, money and effort it takes to recover from such negative events afterwards. I recommend a combination of common sense physical precautions and a few technical tools.

In June of 2008 I wrote a column on 'Collectivity' home inventory software which you can read at DeansConsulting.com. It covers how to take a physical



John Deans

inventory of all items in your home and have it ready for law enforcement or insurance adjusters in case of theft or fire.

Most rural properties have some sort of front gate either at the road, near the homestead, or both.

That outermost gate is where you want to prevent a break-in from starting.

The goal is to discourage the thief from even thinking of hitting your place. The trick is to make your property as difficult to survey, enter, and leave as possible. Burglars look for the path of least resistance, easy concealment and large amounts of loot.

If you just have an open cattle guard with no closed gate with a driveway that leads to your home and barns then your place may be hit next. Once the bad guys cross the property line they will most likely continue until the deed is done unless they meet armed residents.

They will kick in doors, smash windows and haul stuff out of the house once they make it to the home so we need to deter them from ever crossing that property line.

My first recommendation is a strong gate with an automatic opener. I say this because if you just have a gate that has to be opened and closed every time you leave and arrive at the farm or ranch the discipline factor kicks into the equation.

With rain, mud, and cold wind closing the gate and locking it can be a pain when you are late for work. After a few weeks of letting it "stay open just this once," it will stay open more as the months go by.

Bite the bullet and put aside \$2,000-\$3,000 for a quality opener and not just some cheap rig for \$695 that will break or not work for your wife on a cold rainy night with the kids in the car while you are out of town.

Spend the extra funds to have the free exit underground sensor that opens the gate for your car, truck, tractor, ATV or even bike on the way out. Then get remote control openers for all family vehicles along with a free-standing lighted keypad for both entry and exit just in case the remote or underground sensors fail.

Redundancy is the key for automatic gate openers. You can give the code to your trusted delivery people so packages can be brought to the house. Make sure the gate itself has hinges that prevent just lifting the gate off them.

Also strip the threads of the bolts connecting the hinges and the opening arm to prevent thieves using a couple of wrenches to disassemble the gate mounting hardware. I had the hardware welded onto my gate. The harder we make it for the bad guys, the better of a chance they'll just go on down the road.

Once you get your gate secure now we want to monitor it. Odds are you do not have electrical service at the gate due to the distance. Having lights and cameras at the gate can be a challenge but it is not impossible.

First go to a hardware store and buy a solar powered LED motion security light for \$70 to mount that at the gate. Aim the both the LED light and the motion sensor directly at the entry so when a vehicle simply drives

by the light will illuminate them at night.

Having a video camera at the front gate can be very costly even if you already have the conduit with electricity all the way to the entry. Today we will set up a 'poor man's security camera' using a Bushnell game camera available at Walmart for \$150.

These inexpensive game cameras are perfect for a quick and dirty front gate security activity camera. Set it up just inside the fence line aimed at the entry gate to get both a front license plate and good picture of the vehicle.

Though you cannot monitor it live you can extract out the SD card which is usually 2 GB in size capable of holding multiple months of still digital photographs. Each photo has a date and time stamp at the lower right corner.

The \$150 model has both IR and flash illumination for night time shots. I check mine once a week just to review who came by our place, when they arrived and left, and then how long strangers paused at the entrance.

I do this by pulling out the SD card, inserting it into my laptop, and hitting the photo previewer built into Microsoft Explorer on Windows Vista. Right after I review the pictures and verify no weird or unusual activity, I then immediately replace the SD back into the Bushnell game camera before I forget.

So with technology of the keypad access gate, solar powered motion detection light, game camera, there is one last deterrent at our entrance. A simple sign on the gate that reads, "If You Can Read This, You Are In Range."

Bottom line: Living in the country has its freedom but that comes with the responsibility to be able to defend one's castle before the cavalry arrives.

Next week's column: iTunes music management.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233.