

Rising A/C Unit Thefts Inspire New Hardware

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Inventor Seeks to Deter Crime and Help Customers

Indoor home comfort has moved from a desire to a necessity as the environment has evolved. Purchasing one home comfort system, however, can be a stretch to many incomes. Replacing a stolen system can be almost a financial impossibility. Joe Wojtowicz, a Majestic Heating & Cooling service technician, has created a device to keep home comfort where it belongs — at home.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Based in Detroit, Majestic customers had experienced a rash of a/c thefts this past summer, and they continue to experience them as the weather turns cool.

Wanting to help, Wojtowicz went to work. His resulting invention, currently patent pending, has been on the market for less than two months.

The AC Watchdog is an audible alarm located inside the building. The alarm attaches to the unit and measures the refrigerant level. If the level drops below a certain point, the alarm sounds. Richard Taylor, a retired autoworker from Detroit, had an alarm installed for his unit.

Many alarm companies offer a motion sensor that triggers a floodlight. The AC Watchdog, however, is an audible alarm located inside the building that makes a loud screeching noise, alerting owners of potential danger and thieves.

"I heard on the news there had been a lot of thefts," commented Taylor. "I didn't want my unit to be so easy to steal."

His alarm box is in the basement. Taylor is able to turn the siren off at any time, but the thief is unable to disengage or stop the siren from the outside. "It's loud," commented Taylor. "It makes me a little more at ease knowing that my unit is protected."

"It makes a loud screeching kind of noise," said Kathy Forrest, an inspector for Martin Universal

Design, Detroit. "I'm glad I purchased it. My a/c is new and I would like to keep it for a few years."

The AC Watchdog requires no maintenance or upkeep, and there is no monthly service fee for the unit to remain active. The function of the alarm is not dependent on any other alarm system. It installs in about 30 minutes to one hour. Majestic offers a one-year warranty on the alarm, and it is repairable.

"There is nothing hard about it," said Wojtowicz. "It is a very simple device."

SEEING A NEED

"I came up with this idea because I am right in the heart of all these thefts," said Wojtowicz. "Majestic was replacing a lot of units that were stolen or damaged beyond repair and I wanted to protect my customers."

Wojtowicz called alarm companies to assist his customers in protecting their investments. The few companies he talked to were only able to offer a motion sensor that triggers a floodlight.

The owner is able to turn the AC Watchdog Alarm System's siren off at any time, but the thief is unable to disengage or stop the siren from the outside, thus deterring the consequences of copper removal.

It is difficult for anyone who has something stolen to experience the hassle and expense of replacement. Wojtowicz recounted multiple stories of elderly people on fixed incomes who cried when he told them the cost to repair or replace their damaged units.

"I felt awful about it," remembered Wojtowicz. "Most of them were on fixed incomes and couldn't afford to fix the unit, but they had to have it to stay healthy, especially with this summer's heat."

"It is a tearjerker to see people crying because they can't afford to replace the necessity they could barely afford in the first place."

Dr. Jeffery Eisman of Eisman Chiropractic, Detroit, doesn't own an AC Watch Dog Alarm System, but after his multiple losses, he considered one.

An errant contractor placed the first unit, stolen this spring, in the open. Shortly after, thieves meticulously cut the wires, replaced the wire nuts on every wire end that was left, and then took the entire unit. Eisman, concerned about insurance premiums, absorbed the cost and placed the new unit behind a locked and fenced-in area on the roof. Soon after these improvements, thieves came, cut the lock, destroyed the fence, and stole the two units inside. This time he made an insurance claim, however, the insurance company would only cover the units, leaving Eisman to absorb the cost of a new theft deterrent.

To protect the new units, "I am considering poisonous plants, deadly lizards, and a crocodile," said Eisman in frustration.

Because his building is commercial, and not residential, he is investigating tying in the AC Watchdog Alarm System with his current whole-building alarm system. "I like the idea of the system," said Eisman. "My building, however, is right next to an apartment complex and there is no one here at night to turn the alarm off."

DUAL PURPOSE

Wojtowicz's invention is not merely a theft deterrent; it also works as a refrigeration monitor. As mentioned before, when the refrigerant is lower than a fixed setting, the alarm sounds. Low refrigerant reads don't just happen when somebody is trying to steal the unit, it also happens when maintenance or repair is needed. In this case, the customer is able to turn the alarm off and call for repair.

"This doesn't just benefit the customer," said Wojtowicz. "It can be a value add for the contractor and possibly a deal closer."

Wojtowicz is currently promoting the device in multiple markets.

"There are so many avenues where this item can be put into practice," noted Wojtowicz. His theory is that wherever there is an a/c unit, there is a need for an AC Watchdog Alarm System.

"It gives me the comfort of a home alarm," said Forrest. "I know it's there and I know my unit is there."

For more information, visit www.acwatchdog.com.

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