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ONE DOLLAR

Fortress Home: Welcome Mat Bites

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IT is not quite the valley of the shadow of death, but the home front looks menacing these days. Beneath all those Certain-Teed shingle roofs, behind all the Tyvek building wrap, a nation of households imagines itself under siege. And for every domestic fear, it seems, a new product is coming to the rescue.

At the annual International Builders Show here this week — a trade gathering of 90,000 home builders spread across 10.6 miles of aisles — all manner of newfangled security devices went on display to prevent nearly every type of unauthorized intrusion.

There were security cameras from eCamSecure, which can be manipulated by Internet, even from Singapore, to protect a home's perimeter. There were deadbolt locks 28 inches long from Maclock, because "single point" deadbolts will not do any more. And there were legions of products to prevent biological invasions, especially from mold, a flash point in the country's hysteria about germs. All that seemed to be missing was a company that specializes in moat construction and shark farming.

"A lot of our clients are building second homes, so they want to have a lot of security because they're not nearby," said Michael Doherty, a contractor with John Brink General Contractor in Tahoe City, Calif., which builds about two \$5 million houses a year. Those clients, he added, "often have human caretakers, but they crave an extra layer of protective hardware."

Such reactions are "a fascinating combination of realistic concern about safety, especially with some kinds of tools to protect us, and what we might call in my business hypervigilance, which is the sense of threat that exceeds the likelihood of threat," said Dr. Julian D. Ford, director of the Center for Trauma, Response, Recovery and Preparedness at the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington. Dr. Ford's group studies how people's sense of safety has changed since Sept. 11.

Consumers in the market for such products, he said, might fall into three groups: the anxious, those whose peers are also arming themselves with alarms and deadbolts and those who have experienced

some kind of violence or violation.

For just the ordinarily vigilant, the builders' show is offering spray-on compounds to fight bacteria and fungi in the frame of the house; battery-powered devices to alert homeowners that it is time to change dirty air filters; serious backup power generators in case of another blackout like the one that shut down the Northeast in August; and heavy-duty surge protectors for the moment when the power returns.



The SecureLogic™ Secure Mail Vault™ gives you added security against mail and identity theft on your doorstep.

But as for more extreme forms of protection, Dr. Harold I. Schwartz, psychiatrist in chief at the Institute of Living, a large psychiatric division of Hartford Hospital, cautions that just because manufacturers are making them does not mean consumers want them.

One area of particular concern this year at the builders' show is identity theft, which has been called the country's fastest-growing form of crime. A study released in September by the Federal Trade Commission estimated that there were 10 million victims of some form of identity theft in the United States in the previous year and showed that 47 percent of those surveyed worried about becoming identity theft victims.

Even Dr. Schwartz finds it a reasonable worry. "It's probably a bigger threat to people in America than that they would be harmed by a terrorism event," he said. "It's prevalent. My credit card number has been lifted and used."

Don C. Shreve believes his new invention can stop these would-be doppelgangers. Mr. Shreve's company, Mail Theft Solutions, of Jackson, Ga., is introducing

the Defender, an "anti-theft/anti-vandal" mail vault designed to sit, invincibly, on the curb in front of your house.

Mr. Shreve said that a customer called to tell him about a boy who injured himself trying to whack a Defender mailbox with a baseball bat from a moving car. "I don't know if his arm was broken or dislocated, but he was in a lot of pain," Mr. Shreve said.

For \$795 and in any of seven colors, the Defender gives you peace of mind, knowing that your enormous tax refund, royalty check or new credit card sits securely behind seam-welded steel an eighth of an inch thick. The box itself stands about four feet high on a tapering pedestal that makes the slightest nod to evening wear, and it holds a package of 9 by 9 by 12 inches. The pedestal is hollow so that it can hold many days' worth of mail — in case you are traveling.

Mr. Shreve, who previously published and then sold a deer-hunting magazine with a circulation of 50,000, invented the Defender as an alternative to the "brick enclosure" mailboxes sprouting up on streets in Georgia's better suburbs. Transportation officials, Mr. Shreve noted, do not like brick fixtures so close to the road. For safety's sake, he designed the Defender with aluminum bolts into the ground, so it will break away easily if hit by a car.

For those even more concerned about mail theft, there is the Secure Mail Vault by Energy Technology Laboratories, of Modesto, Calif. The Secure Mail Vault, which sells for \$349, is a pole-mounted unit made of 14-gauge steel with a wave-shape mail slot atop the box to make sure that mail goes in but won't come out, except to the owner.

Ray Engel, the company's chief executive, said the inspiration for designing the box came from a series of mail thefts in Modesto. "Mail theft and identity theft are kissing cousins," Mr. Engel said.

The owner of the Secure Mail Vault opens an outer door to find a locked inner door, which has a touch pad with a secret code. The mail slot is big enough to take a standard priority-mail box an inch and three-quarters thick.

"We were nine months getting it approved by the Postal Service," Mr. Engel said. A tiny sensor controls lights on the outside: red to tell the letter carrier there is mail to

be picked up; green to tell the owner there is incoming mail. Nonetheless, the Postal Service required the familiar red tag as well.

Mr. Engel's company, better known for making Oxygenics shower heads, is introducing the Secure Logic Wall Vault, another item for the security-conscious at the show: a gun safe worthy of James Bond. It opens biometrically, with a fingerprint scan. The slick, stainless steel safe mounts nearly flush into a wall and can be hidden by a painting. Its slide-down door opens silently — should an intruder be listening in the next room — to reveal a loaded handgun in the three-and-a-half-inch cavity, lined with a velvetlike cloth.

"People are arming themselves like never before against home invasions," Mr. Engel said. "But a good place to keep a loaded firearm just hasn't been there." He said the idea for a strong, affordable gun safe came from police officers who lamented having to keep guns at home with their children.

The most stylish gun safe for the home, however, would be the Cascade, a vintage-looking vault about the size of an old icebox, available from the American Security Products Company of Fontana, Calif. For \$2,000, the gun owner gets 11-gauge steel hand-painted to a high gloss in a choice of seven colors, with plush velour interior.

Corey Edwards, a regional sales manager for the company, said he tells clients they need security in three places. They need perimeter cameras, alarms and other deterrents on the outside; they need infrared sensors inside; and they need a safe for guns and valuables.

"Most people don't get all three," Mr. Edwards said. "They'll dump a bunch of money on one thing, and thieves will get them another way."

Thieves, of course, have always been there. If there is more concern at the builders' show about theft, threat and safety this year, it just may be because that is what people will be willing to buy. Dr. Ford, the psychologist at the University of Connecticut, said that an event like Sept. 11, "puts issues on their radar screens that would not formerly have been there."

He added: "That's why people are prioritizing safety now. It's partly rational and partly to get a sense of control — even if it's not necessary."