

Playing it Safe

By Tara Marion

Each year businesses lose money and other property to burglary, internal pilferage and privacy issues.

For that reason, most businesses use safes and/or vaults to protect cash, documents, computer tapes, merchandise and other essential items.

These security measures are designed to protect their contents against unauthorized access and/or theft of the container itself.

“Many safes nowadays aren’t as heavy as they used to be,” said Tom Ziemer, owner of **Hoogerhyde Safe & Lock** in Grand Rapids. “We bolt down a lot of them to the floor.”

This prevents the safe from being laid on its side and attacked from the bottom or being removed from the premises.

The terms are often used interchangeably, but the primary difference between a safe and a vault is size. A safe, security experts say, is a very general term. It is described as a container or box, capable of being locked, and usually of metal, in which to store valuables, whereas a vault is a secure room.

Businesses use safes and vaults to protect their valuables without having to turn their properties into fortresses.

Banks use them to store money and safe-deposit boxes, and jewelers use them to store inventory. Other business uses, according to Ziemer and Matt Lukaart, security consultant at **AB Lock and Safe** in Wyoming, are less obvious.

Travel agents use them to stow airline tickets. Health care providers use them to protect medical records. Pharmacies use them to store narcotic drugs. Businesses that don’t transfer data off-site use them to store back-up tapes. Convenience stores and gas stations use them to stash cigarette stamps, lottery tickets and cash after hours.

The locksmith industry is one that doesn’t seem to be affected by the recession. Ziemer said sales were up 18 percent last year.

“The recession actually seems to have helped us because people are more concerned about security,” he explained. “I think there tends to be more break-ins when the economy is bad.”

Safes and vaults offer varying levels of security. They are rated by their levels of fire- and burglar-resistance. Prices range accordingly.

“Just a small, fire-proof safe can start as low as \$200. A really high-security safe can go up to as much as \$6,000,” Ziemer explained. “It all depends on what they’re using them for.”

There haven’t been any leaps and bounds when it comes to technological advancements in safes and vaults in recent years, Lukaart said. Over the past six to eight years though, electronic push-button locks have surpassed traditional combination padlocks in popularity. When people have to get in and out of their safes and vaults frequently, it’s just more convenient to have an electronic keypad,” he said.

“Like with other manufacturing,” Ziemer said, “there is a trend over the last several years for more safes to be made overseas.”

Hoogerhyde Safe has been in business since 1926 and moved into a new building in December 2004. It specializes in the sales and service of safes and vaults.

AB Lock has been in business for 30 years. It offers sales and service on safes and vaults, as well as other locksmith services.