

UNATTENDED OPERATION FOR GARAGE DOOR OPENERS

The safety feature you need to know about

By Greg Matias, The Genie Company

Editor's Note: For Garage Door Safety Month, this article from Matias is timely and extremely relevant. It clearly outlines safety requirements for unattended operation installations, and as smartphones become more commonly used to open and close garage doors, this is critical information for installers to know.

What is "unattended operation"?

When a smartphone is used to open or close a garage door, the industry refers to it as "unattended operation." It is considered "unattended" because the person operating the door may not be in the immediate vicinity of the moving door.

When the person operating the door is in the immediate vicinity, they can observe the area around the door and determine whether it is safe to close. But unattended operation via mobile phone allows the user to operate the door from almost any place they have a cellular or internet connection. The person pressing the button on the phone could be at their office or across the continent and most likely will not be able to observe the door or determine whether it's safe to open or close.

Timer-to-close rule-based activation

Unattended operation is not limited to activation via smartphone.

Many garage door operators have timers that allow the user to set the amount of time before the door will automatically close—after one or two hours of being continually open or whatever time frame the user chooses to set.

When using a timer to control the door, the user does not need to press a local wall control or remote control.

The timer-to-close feature is another example of unattended operation. A person may not be in the immediate area when the door closes.

Therefore, the operator system must have the same additional safety features as described above.

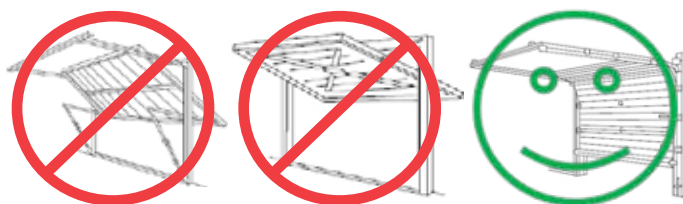
Device certification

Meeting the unattended operation requirements is not just a good idea or a best practice; it is a mandatory part of the industry's UL 325 standard and is also established as part of U.S. federal law according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) rule (16 CFR Part 1211).

Not all third-party devices or apps are certified, so it is important to check with the manufacturer to confirm before installation.

Door types

Unattended operation is only permitted for vertically moving sectional garage doors (most common type) and horizontally sliding doors. It is NOT permitted for one-piece overhead doors and swing-type garage doors.



Audible alarm

Before you can close the door from an unattended location, an audible alert in the garage must sound for at least five seconds. There are requirements for the sound level and frequency. These requirements are defined in UL 325, so it is critical to be sure that the control adheres to these specifications and is properly certified.

Visual alert

In addition to an alarm, a visual alert must flash for at least five seconds before you can close the door unattended. There are also specific requirements that must be met for visibility (lumens, flash rate, etc.) when using unattended operation for door control.

2-strike lockout

If the door does not fully close after two attempts from the unattended signal (i.e., from a smartphone) due to an obstruction or safety reverse device such as a photo-eye, edge sensor, or inherent reversal system, the door operator system must lock out or ignore additional attempts to close from the unattended system.

This safety feature is designed to prevent someone in a remote location from repeatedly starting the door in the downward direction when it is unsafe to do so. The ability to close the door via smartphone can be reset when someone in the area of the door uses a "local" control to move the door.



JUNE IS GARAGE DOOR SAFETY MONTH

Warning label

When unattended operation is available with an operator, a special label or placard should be provided by the manufacturer to warn of unexpected door movement. This label needs to be located near the operator's local controls and should be visible from the area around the door. This is a critical safety feature that should not be overlooked when installing the operator or an external control.



Integrated control

Many new operators have unattended operation features integrated inside the head. These operators connect to the local Wi-Fi and have all the warning features built in, and also include special warnings to indicate that they can be remotely operated and that the door may move unexpectedly when unattended operation is used.



External control devices

External devices that connect to the local Wi-Fi and interface with the operator are available and can be added to an existing system to provide an unattended operation option. These devices have the greatest potential risk of misuse because they may not have all the necessary safety features, may not be labeled and listed, and may not be able to be connected to any operator in any condition.

It is extremely important to be sure that any external device used for unattended operation is labeled and listed to the UL 325 standard and includes the proper warnings and alert systems. Additionally, these devices should not be installed on older operators that do not have photo-eye entrapment-protection devices.

Integration with security systems and home automation

With the advent of the smart home and smart automation-integrated security systems, it has become easier to monitor and control access to the home remotely. Connecting the garage door to these systems may be convenient, but if users don't heed the proper warnings and alerts, a dangerous situation could be created. Be sure to check with the manufacturers of these controls and make sure they are labeled and listed to UL 325 before connecting an operator to these systems.

For more information about the safe use of garage door operators, visit Safety Tips on www.dasma.com and the UL Unattended Operation Safety page at www.ul.com. ■

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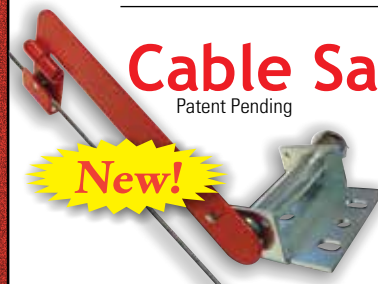
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