

LIFESTYLES

# 'Your basement is flooding!' (says text alert from sensor)

By KEVIN HUNT  
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS | OCT 29, 2015



D-Link's Wi-Fi Water Sensor.(D-Link)

Not every home-automation device, sexed up, looks as desirable as a smart thermostat. A Wi-Fi-connected water sensor, however it's dressed, is still a lowly water sensor serving daily sentry over a washing machine, water heater or flood-prone basement.

It's not glamorous work, but an efficient water sensor can save thousands in potential damages. D-Link's Wi-Fi Water Sensor (Model DCH-S160, \$59.99), a new addition to the mydlink smart-home lineup, is a basic monitor that, connected to a home network, sends a smartphone alert when it detects water.

The sensor also emits an alarm, at an unenthusiastic 70 decibels, audible beyond 10 feet only to house mice and Chihuahuas. It's actually only a teaser: D-Link sells a companion siren with selectable volume up to 100 decibels, model DCH-S220, for 49.99. THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!

A basic, not-so-smart water sensor like Honeywell's RWD41 Water Defense Water Sensing Alarm costs about \$20 and shrieks like a slasher-movie victim when it detects water. But, unlike the D-Link sensor, it cannot notify you when the water heater bursts while you're at work.

The D-Link Water Sensor, which plugs directly into an electrical outlet, comes with a 3.3-foot phone cable that extends from the module's body to meet the 1.6-foot sensor cable. Extending the reach of the sensor is as easy as adding another phone cable.

Adding the module, 2.5 inches tall, to a home network has been streamlined for WPS-capable routers with a Wi-Fi Protected Setup button for quick pairing. Get started by downloading the mydlink Home app (iOS, Android) or scanning a QR code on the quick-install instructions.

Not much can go wrong. My Apple router is compatible with WPS but does not have a pair button, so I connected the Water Sensor manually, using the app, to my home network. Once connected, you can instruct the device how to act when it senses water by set "actions."

This made me feel extremely lonely because I could only program it to notify by smartphone. A fully automated D-Link home would have the connected siren, a smart security camera that would send instant updates and light bulbs that would blink wildly when the water sensor alarm activates.

Without a standard wireless protocol, a prospective smart home must choose a home-automation brand and stick with it — or use multiple apps and multiple technologies. Or hope for a smart hub that unites some of the competing devices. Wouldn't it be great, for instance, if the water sensor could communicate immediately with the WeMo LED Lighting Starter Kit (two bulbs, with a bonus bulb in the offer, and a hub for \$42) and its app that I just bought?

The sensor, by its lonesome, is extremely sensitive. When I dipped the tip into a sink filled with water, the alarm immediately sounded (almost a lullaby), an LED blinked and, within a minute or two, the alert showed on my smartphone. The entire sensor cable, not just the rounded tip, detects water. So wrap it around a water heater's base or along a pipe or behind a refrigerator.

I knew exactly where I wanted the Water Sensor — next to the sump pump. The sensor arrived, coincidentally, shortly before Joaquin became a Category 4 hurricane in the Bahamas. This warning, about 1,100 miles from my home along the Connecticut coast, put the Water Sensor and me on alert.

If the basement flooded overnight during sleeping hours, a 70-decibel alarm and smartphone notification wouldn't help much. The hurricane missed our coastline, but the Water Sensor stood guard at the sump pump, near a vulnerable basement door, through the night.

D-Link's Wi-Fi Water Sensor makes a good case for a connected sensor, but I'm already envisioning a 2.0 version that's louder (without the add-on siren) and maybe less expensive. Until then, here's a 70-decibel shoutout to a smart device that's not so sexy but a potential savior.

**What:** D-Link DCH - S160 Wi-Fi Water Sensor

**Price:** \$59.99

**The good:** An Internet-connected water sensor that sends mobile alerts when it detects water.

**Not so good:** Three times the price of a standard water sensor; alarm volume so low that Netgear sells a separate siren.

**Information:** [us.dlink.com](http://us.dlink.com)