

Practical Tips To Secure Your Home, Protect Your Family And Valuables

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Practical Tips To Secure Your Home, Protect Your Family And Valuables

INTRODUCTION

It's no secret that crime is increasing every year and is invading what once was considered "safe communities. " As the following FBI report shows, crime is on the rise. Crimes against property occurs on the average of 20 times a minute with estimated \$1,000 loss for each occurrence. Burglary is a crime of opportunity where entry is gained due to the carelessness of homeowners.

Single family homes are twice as likely to be burglarized than apartments. While receiving a lot of publicity when it happens, hotels and motels account for less than 3% of all burglaries The most likely things to be stolen in a burglary are cash, small electronic equipment, home computers, cameras, jewelry, furs, tools and hand guns.

Few people really bother about security until something happens to them, or a neighbor. The public's complacent attitude is burglar's best friend, and your worst enemy. There are many things the average person can do to make their home less of a target. This report will get your started on the right road. Remember the two things any burglar fears the most are being seen, and having to take too much time to complete the crime.

While burglars typically "target" a home when no one is home, if you surprise one in the act, your chances of being injured too high to attempt to intervene. A sobering statistic shows many homeowners attempting to defend themselves, family members or their property with a weapon - end up having it turned on themselves.

Vital statistics on Crime in the United States,
reported offenses 1985-1991
Source: Uniform Crime Reports FBI

| | VIOLENT | PROPERTY | MURDER & | FORCIBLE |
|------|-----------|------------|--------------|----------|
| YEAR | CRIMES | CRIMES | MANSLAUGHTER | RAPE |
| 1985 | 1,328,870 | 11,102,600 | 18,980 | 87,670 |
| 1986 | 1,489,170 | 11,722,700 | 20,610 | 91,460 |
| 1987 | 1,484,000 | 12,024,700 | 20,100 | 91,110 |
| 1988 | 1,566,220 | 12,356,900 | 20,680 | 92,490 |
| 1989 | 1,646,040 | 12,605,400 | 21,500 | 94,500 |
| 1990 | 1,820,130 | 12,655,500 | 23,440 | 102,560 |
| 1991 | 1,911,770 | 12,961,100 | 24,700 | 106,590 |

| LARCENY | | | |
|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| YEAR | ROBBERY | BURGLARY | & THEFT |
| 1985 | 497,870 | 3,073,300 | 6,926,400 |
| 1986 | 542,780 | 3,241,400 | 7,257,200 |
| 1987 | 517,700 | 3,236,200 | 7,499,900 |
| 1988 | 542,970 | 3,218,100 | 7,705,900 |
| 1989 | 578,330 | 3,168,200 | 7,872,400 |
| 1990 | 639,270 | 3,073,900 | 7,945,700 |
| 1991 | 687,730 | 3,157,200 | 8,142,200 |

A SECURITY SURVEY

Many local law enforcement agencies will provide a free "walk through" of your property. The purpose is to identify all potential trouble spots and determine what steps can be implemented to improve the overall security of your property. You can probably organize a "block party" and have the police "sweep" your entire block. Because of cost-cutting many local law enforcement agencies are stretched to the limit and there may be a long waiting list. Sometimes off-duty police officers will do this kind of work for a nominal fee. A few words of caution are in order if you have some third party security company do a survey for you. Many of course will do a free survey to get their foot in your door and try and sell you their security devices. So be forewarned that a locksmith will probably try and sell you better locks, a alarm company a security system and so on. So use common sense.

PUT YOURSELF IN A BURGLAR'S SHOES

One thing every homeowner should do at least twice a year is take a walk around and through your property with a close friend or neighbor who is not too familiar with your house. Start outside and ask yourself "how would I best break in? The purpose of not doing it alone is your pal may spot things you'll overlook. Return the favor and complete a survey for your friend.

Besides the obvious "lived-in" look, don't get into a habit of only doing certain things only when you're not home. Chances are good you can tell when your neighbor isn't home. Remember it's a burglar's job to know the same things. Most professional criminals can tell nobody's home at least four or five houses away.

Several dead giveaways are always closing the drapes ONLY when you're not home. Having no garbage cans out collection day, or an empty can sitting at the curb, are tip-offs you're not home. So are closing up the house as tight as a drum in the hot summer

months without the air-conditioner running. Turning on a certain light or two and every other room is in total darkness. Ditto for picking up all the kid's toys, taking in the dog, shutting the garage door if you frequently leave it open, and turning off the lawn sprinkler.

Many people before leaving turn on the "burglar light, " the light over the kitchen sink. You might as well hang a sign on the front door you're not home! If you use an answering machine never leave a message that you're not home. Instead say you can't come to the phone right now. If you don't have a machine, turn down the volume on phones before leaving so it can't be heard from outside - another dead giveaway nobody's home.

EFFECTIVE BURGLAR DETERRENTS

You've probably head it several times and it's true! A dog is one of the best deterrents. Not because it's vicious, it need not even be seen, but it has to be heard. A dog with a menacing bark will scare away a lot of would-be burglars, not only because they don't know what kind of dog you have and what risk it would be to them if try tried to break in, but more likely because a noisy dog will create a disturbance and get attention - the last thing a burglar wants!

If you don't have a dog there's nothing stopping you from pretending. A Beware of Dog sign on your fence, a dog house in the back yard, even a loose dog chain or bowl can drive away a potential burglar. Don't be fooled by companies that provide cheap electronic "dogs" who bark none stop if a intruder trips a relay or otherwise signals his presence. Most experienced prowlers are familiar with these devices and won't be fooled or scared off.

Electronic devices that are effective besides the typical whole house alarm systems for windows and doors are infrared or motion detectors that sense movement or the heat given off by one's body. Anyone approaching too close will trigger any number of attached devices. The most effective are powerful lights or burglar horns that either flood the area with light or fill the air with a deafening sound without notice. Just like a barking dog, the would-be burglar will usually hightail it out of there for fear of being discovered.

To be effective, the sensitivity of such devices much not be set too high or stray animals will set them off too frequently which will get you on the wrong side of your neighbors. Also be sure such devices are high enough that they can't be easily turned off or broken.

SECURING DOORS

Illegal entry through the front door occurs more often than all other points of entry combined! All exterior doors should be of solid hard wood or steel reinforced. A good door does no good if the door frame is in bad shape or of inferior construction. Pay special attention to the door jams. Most, even in expensive homes are made out of cheap pine. It don't take much force to "kick in" the door even if protected with dead bolts, if the strike plate is attached with only a couple of 1/2 or 3/4 inch screws.

Take a few minutes and install 2-1/2 to 3 inch stainless steel or nickel plated screws in all your exterior door jams. Be sure screws go at least 1-3/4 inch deep into the underlying framing lumber. While you at it, consider getting heavy duty strike plates or a door reinforcer kit sold in many larger home improvement centers. Be advised you may have to chisel out more of the door jam to install but it's worth the effort for the greater protection provided. Another way to increase the chances of your door holding is to further protect it from being kicked in by installing a device on the floor that the door rests against on inside center when shut, and swings away when the door opens.

Any kind of sliding glass door is a favorite target. Guard against the door being lifted up and out by installing several screws into the door's upper track. Open and shut the door through its entire range to allow just enough of the screw's head protruding to allow free movement without allowing the door to be removed. Several devices can be installed into the door's upper or lower track that acts much like a dead bolt by running a heavy pin through the door track and deep into the frame. Just having a length of old broom handle at a 45 degree angle in the door track also prevents the door from easily being forced open and works nearly as well!

Your garage door is easy pickings unless you have an electronic door opener. Today these devices are fairly cheap (around \$150) and make it practically impossible to force open the overhead door from the outside without breaking through the actual door panels due to the high tension produced from the worm drive or chain device that makes the openers work. Yes, it is possible for a burglar to punch in the right code and gain access, but with today's remote controls providing so many possible combinations, the odds are very slight, and the burglar won't waste the time trying all the possibilities.

Final bit of advice on automatic door openers. Do be sure to change the security code from the preinstalled settings which are almost always set to zeros. Also, if you notice your door open and you're sure you shut it, one of your neighbors probably

set his opener to the same code. Take the time to change your setting, or you're giving a potential burglar a great opportunity to gain free access.

SECURING WINDOWS

Burglars break windows as a last resort - or by accident. The preferred method is cutting an access hole or slipping in a thin stiff wire and undoing the locking device. Most double hung windows have cheap locks which should be replaced by heavy duty sash locks or even keyed locks, if you can put up with the inconvenience. An old trick is installing a small eyebolt in either corner. If done correctly the window can't be opened, with the eyebolt in place from the outside. Of course you could screw the window shut by drilling a hole through the frame but it defeats the purpose of having a window, and presents a fire hazard. Not recommended.

The safest windows are glass block. Almost impossible to break through, they of course can't be opened and are not as pleasing to look at. A good choice for basements or areas at or near ground level.

Another good protection is installed roll-a-way electric security shutters, or decorative security grates. The main downside is they can prove to be a serious fire hazard and prevent your escape. Newer models install on tracks or can easily be pushed open from inside to lessen their danger in the event of fire and the thick smoke sure to accompany it.

HOUSEHOLD INVENTORY

The above steps can go a long way to protecting your home but no matter how secure your residence is, if a professional burglar has targeted your home and is determined to break in, the unthinkable may still happen. To aid law enforcement agencies and greatly assist in insurance claims you should maintain a detailed household inventory of all your valuables.

It makes sense to "mark" important items with some permanent identifying mark. There are a variety of simple tools you can rent that will engrave serial numbers, a driver's license number or some other unique marking into your valuables.

Remember most burglars "fence" stolen items in order to get cash, usually for illegal drugs. You'll greatly reduce the chances of someone walking off with your TV, VCR or other valuables if it has a conspicuous ID number that can't be removed, simply because it will greatly reduce its street value and make it too much work to get rid of, and of course it is a

lot easier to trace and return the property to the rightful owner.

Today, many people have a video camera. Sweep each room and record the contents from several different perspectives. Next, take close-ups of really important items. To tie-in, have a family member pose with the valuables. In a clear voice identify each item, the date of purchase, price paid and model and serial numbers. Remember to update the tape every time you purchase something new.

If you don't have a video camera, a regular camera also works well. Make a companion audio tape to go along with it. It very important that the tapes or pictures be kept off the property or they may be stolen or damaged. Keep them in a safety deposit box. Now set aside a hour or so and complete the security check list on the following page. Correct weak points as soon as possible and your home and belongings will be more secure.

HOME SECURITY AND SAFETY CHECK LIST

GENERAL SECURITY

Have you arranged to have member of a law enforcement agency do a professional survey?

Are all trees and shrubs pruned and well maintained to prevent anyone from hiding unseen?

Do any trees, down pipes, lattice work provide easy access to upper floors?

If you have skylights can they be removed from the outside or easily broken?

Any ladders, tools kept outside to assist any potential intruder?

Are you guilty of keeping a hidden house key outside the house where it's sure to be found?

Is your home well lighted with particular attention to exterior doors?

Can your main entrance be seen from the street?

Are exterior doors at least 1-3/4 inch thick and made from solid wood or reinforced with metal?

Do all exterior doors have heavy duty dead bolts and reinforced

door jams?

Can anyone gain easy access through a mail slot, dryer vent, or pet entrance?

If doors have glass panels can someone break through and defeat the locking mechanism?

Have all sliding glass doors been protected from being easily lifted out from their frames?

Are all exterior lights and security devices in good working order and protected from breakage?

Does the door from the attached garage leading to the house have a dead bolt?

Does your overhead door have a working electronic door opener?

Does your overhead door have any loose, broken or missing door panels or hardware?

Do you keep the overhead doors closed, and your car locked inside the garage?

Do all windows have reinforced locking devices that can be secured in the open position?

Do all screens and storm windows have reinforced locks?

Do ground level windows have guards or grates?

Are basement windows glass block or protected by grates or security devices?

All irreplaceable items kept in high quality fire resistant safe or in off-site safety deposit box?

Do you have a complete and current video tape or pictures of all your valuables off-site?

Are all firearms kept secured and apart from ammunition?

FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY

Is your heating system in proper working order and inspected for dangerous leaks yearly?

Is there ample air circulation around appliances that are likely to overheat?

Any overloaded circuits, long extension cords runs, too many devices plugged unto one outlet?

Fireplaces, chimney free of dangerous build ups that could catch on fire?

Protective grate in front of fireplace to prevent sparks, hot logs from rolling into room?

Kitchen oven hood and far clear of greasy build-up that could cause a fire?

Smoke detectors installed on each level and tested weekly?

Smoke detector batteries replaced every 12 months or less?

Working fire extinguisher in kitchen, basement, garage, auto?

All family members sleep with bedroom door closed to prevent spread of fire, smoke?

All family members practice fire drill, know escape route, designated meeting place to go outside?

Children know how to use phone to get help in an emergency?

WHEN AWAY FOR EXTENDED PERIODS

Security system armed? Automatic timers for lights, radio turned on? Phones turned down?

Arrange for neighbor to watch house, cut, water grass, give house that lived-in look?

No change in normal pattern of opening, shutting drapes, dead give-away lighting patterns?

Arrange to stop mail, newspaper delivery, yard work performed?

Arrange to have local police give "special attention" for area beat car?