

Making Your Home Safer

If you're locked out of your home, can you still get in?... through an unlocked window in the back, or using an extra key hidden under a flowerpot or up on a ledge?

If you can break in, so can a burglar! A small investment of time and money can make your home more secure and can reduce your chances of being a victim of burglary, assault, or vandalism.

Get to know your neighbors. Watchful neighbors who look out for you, as well as themselves, are a front-line defense against crime. In almost half of all residential burglaries, thieves enter through an unlocked door or unlocked window.

Check the Locks

- ❑ Make sure every external door has a sturdy, well-installed deadbolt lock with a minimum of IV21' bolt.
- ❑ Secure sliding glass doors with commercially available locks or with a broomstick or wooden dowel in the track to jam the door, in case someone tries to pry it open. Insert a pin in a hole drilled in the sliding door frame that goes through to the fixed frame to prevent anyone from lifting the door off its track.
- ❑ Secure double-hung windows by using keylocks or by sliding a bolt or nail through a hole drilled at a downward angle in top corners of the inside sash and partway through the outside sash. Secure basement windows too. The hole should be large enough that the nail or bolt slides in and out freely, in case you

have to open the window fast in an emergency.

- ❑ Don't hide keys in mailboxes, planters, or under doormats. Give an extra key to a neighbor you trust.
- ❑ If you've just moved into a new house or apartment, have the locks changed.

Check the Doors

Locks aren't effective if they're on flimsy doors.

- ❑ Make sure all exterior doors are metal or solid, 1 1/2" hardwood.
- ❑ Doors should fit tightly in their frames, with hinge pins on the inside.
- ❑ Install a peephole or wide-angle viewer in all entry doors, so you can see who is outside without opening the door. Door chains are not security devices—they break easily and won't keep out an intruder.

Check the Outside

To discourage burglars from selecting your home as their target of opportunity, make sure to:

- ❑ Trim shrubbery that hides doors or windows. Cut tree limbs that could help a thief climb into windows.
- ❑ Turn on outside lights after dark to illuminate porches, entrances and yards—front & back. Consider timers that turn on outside lights, or install motion detectors.
- ❑ Keep your yard well maintained. Store ladders and tools inside your locked garage, basement, or storage shed when you're not using them.

- ❑ Clearly display your house number, so Police and other emergency vehicles can find your home quickly.
- ❑ Keep up the appearance of the neighborhood. Broken street lights, abandoned cars, vacant buildings, graffiti, litter and run-down areas attract crime. Work with the local government and your neighbors to organize community clean-up days.
- ❑ Put lights and a radio on timers to create the illusion that someone is at home when you go away. Leave shades, blinds and curtains in normal positions. Stop the mail and newspapers, or ask a neighbor to take them in.
- ❑ Update your home inventory, listing pilferable items like VCRs, stereos, cameras and computers. Take photos or make videos of items, list descriptions and serial numbers. Check with law enforcement about Operation Identification—engraving your valuables. If your home is burglarized, this can help identify stolen items & make insurance claims easier to file.

What About Alarms

If you have valuables in your home, or if you live in an isolated area or a neighborhood vulnerable to break-ins, consider an alarm system.

Before you invest in alarms:

- ❑ Check with several companies and decide what level of security fits your needs. Sources of information include your local police department, the public library, and the Better Business Bureau.

- ❑ Look for an established company and check its references before using them.
- ❑ Learn how to use your system properly. If you continually set off false alarms, your neighbors will ignore the noise, and you could even be fined by local law enforcement agencies.

Burglars Can Take More Than Your Property

Burglars generally don't want to run into their victims. But if they're surprised by someone coming home, or if they pick an occupied home, someone may get hurt.

- ❑ If you see a screen that has been cut, a broken window, or a door that's been left open, don't go in. Call the police from a neighbor's house or a public phone.
- ❑ If you hear a noise that sounds like someone breaking in or moving around, quietly call the police and wait calmly until they arrive. If you can leave safely, do so. Otherwise, lock yourself in a room, or, if the intruder enters the room you are in, pretend to be asleep.
- ❑ Think carefully before buying a firearm for protection. Guns can be stolen and sold to anyone, or captured and used on you or the police. If you do own a gun, keep it locked up, with the ammunition secured separately, and learn how to use it safely.

Look Beyond Locks and Alarms

- ❑ Join or help start a Neighborhood Watch group. If one doesn't exist, ask your

police or sheriff's department to help you start one.

- ❑ Look around for things that could contribute to crime—poor street lighting, abandoned cars, vacant lots, littered playgrounds with broken equipment, homes that elderly people have trouble maintaining. Help organize a neighborhood clean up/fix-up day.
- ❑ Keep written records of all furniture, jewelry and electronic products. If possible, keep these records in a safe deposit box, fireproof safe or other secure place. Take pictures or a video, and keep purchase information and serial numbers if available. These help law enforcement agencies track recovered items.
- ❑ If your neighbors are ever victims, help them out. Offer sympathy and support; help with meals, repairs, or baby-sitting.