

*Despite the common belief, burglars are not intimidated by the daylight. Statistically, most of the break-in incidents happen during the daytime, when people are away at work. An open window is an invitation. Do lock your windows when you are away from home. Windows with latches are very easy to slide open, that's why you should use secondary blocking devices that will discourage burglars. Usually housebreakers prefer ground floor windows and windows that are accessible from a balcony, fence or a stair. When you secure the windows make sure burglars cannot reach and remove the blocking device. If you have an alarm system in your home, connect it to the accessible windows as well.*

## **Protect yourself against home burglary**

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Whether you live in a house, a condo or an apartment, a break-in can permanently shatter your feeling of security at home.

According to FBI statistics, a house, apartment or condominium is burglarized once every 15 seconds.

Fortunately, burglary is probably the most preventable of crimes. By taking a few simple precautions, you can dramatically reduce the risks.

Of course, every home and every situation is different, and there are no guarantees.

Most home burglars do not give great amounts of thought to planning the job and assessing the benefits vs. dangers, but understanding how they choose a target can go a long way in reducing your chances of being a victim.

Most burglars look for:

- Something worth stealing
- Easy access combined with low visibility
- A home that is unoccupied

**How to prevent break-ins:**

- **Fool them by making your home look occupied all the time.**
- Use automatic timers on lights when away from home.---Use Lighting to Show Signs of Activity at Night
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- Always park your cars in the garage with the garage door shut. A burglar may otherwise notice a pattern that a closed garage door or no cars in the driveway means no one is home. Closing the garage door and having curtains or blinds on the garage windows also hides some of your belongings.
- Place radios on automatic timers and raise the volume so they can be heard outside.

- Lower the sound of your telephone ringer and answering machine so that they *can't* be heard outside.
- Never leave notes on your door that can tip off burglars.

**When away for more than a day:**

- If possible, have your telephone calls forwarded when you are away from home. Burglars sometimes check to see if someone is home by making a telephone call.
- Have a trusted neighbor pick up the mail and newspaper. If possible, do not have either stopped. That gives information about you being away from home to others whom you do not know.
- If away for an extended period, have a plan in place to have the grass mowed or snow shoveled.
- If you are away from home on garbage pickup day, ask a trusted neighbor to put your garbage cans out to the street and take them back in. You may wish to have your neighbor use your garbage cans while you are out. Burglars sometimes check for empty cans as a sign the family is away.
- There are systems available that will open and close window draperies by timer. Constantly open or closed curtains can tip the burglar off that no one is home.
- Even if you don't need specific help, always tell a trusted neighbor if you are going to be gone for a few days.
- If you are going to be gone for an extended period, ask your local police to check your home periodically.

**In short, make your house look the *same* whether you are away or at home.**

**Eliminate hiding places**

- Make sure there is good lighting around the place where you park.
- Install motion detector lights around your house instead of just leaving lights on at night. The lights coming on and turning off attract the

attention of neighbors. Install these lights at least 8 feet above the ground so they are more difficult to disable.

- Install the motion detector lights so they light all doors and windows. Doors, since they are the preferred entry point, should be the first priority to illuminate, followed by windows.
- Remove bushes and shrubs from around the house, especially under windows and next to doors. Keep your yard free of overgrowth.
- If you DO have shrubs and bushes, select ones with thorns to deter potential intruders from hiding in them.
- Install a security alarm system with a loud alarm and/or flashing lights. This will attract the attention of neighbors. If you install an alarm, display the decals, and remember to test the system periodically.

#### **Use common sense caution**

- Always lock all doors and windows when you leave the house.
- Use a peephole to identify visitors before opening your door.
- Do not hide spare keys outside your home, instead give one to a trusted neighbor.
- Do not provide your house keys to service people.
- Do not invite strangers into your home.
- Do not have money or jewelry lying out in view from a window. If possible, keep jewelry and other small valuables and important documents in a safe deposit box.
- Do not tell strangers your daily routines.
- If you are at home working outside, leave all other doors that are out of sight locked.
- Avoid telling others about the valuables in your home.
- If you have children, discuss home security with them, such as not talking with strangers about their home, its contents or family schedules.

#### **Make your home a harder target**

**Did you know?** The average burglar will spend no more than four to five minutes trying to break into a residence.

- **When moving into a new residence, have the locks changed.**

- **Consult a good locksmith to make sure you have the correct types of locks on your doors and windows.**
- **Secure your exterior doors and any doors from attached garages by installing:**
  - Good quality deadbolt door locks
  - Security-type door strikes
  - Strong, properly installed doors and doorframes that cannot be spread apart
  - Security-type hinges
- **Secure your windows** by installing additional locks and installing impact-resistant glass on any windows within 42" of a door lock. This will make it more difficult to break the glass, reach in, and unlock the lock.
- **Prune lower branches** of trees near your house if they could help a burglar gain access to a second story window.
- **Secure your patio door** with a pin-type lock, a key lock, or a steel rod inserted into the door channel.
- **Secure your garage** by installing automatic openers or bolt-type locks on each end of the garage doors.

**Take time to become knowledgeable about your situation and your options so that you can best decide what to do. And remember, you can also ask your local police department for advice.**

#### **Inventory and mark your belongings.**

Save receipts from important purchases—Keep in a specific file.

Take digital pictures of important belonging—download onto a diskette and store in a safe place.

Photograph each room from all angles and put in file with receipts.

Mark your belongings with an engraving pen so that they can be traced and return them to you if stolen. These pens are usually available at your local police station. Ask your police department what numbers to use when marking your belongings.

***Never mark them with your social security number.***

**Be a good neighbor**

- Organize a cookout or other apartment or neighborhood get together so neighbors can get to know one another.
- Organize or participate in an Apartment Watch or Neighborhood Watch program.
- Arrange for a local police officer to complete an apartment security survey, or educate your neighborhood about specific safety concerns.
- If you are an apartment dweller, notify management if you notice burned out light bulbs, dark corridors, broken locks on mailboxes and doors and/or other safety concerns.
- Call the police immediately if you see suspicious activity in your neighborhood.

## A WORD ABOUT PROWLERS

### **Prowlers**

Prowlers can be just as or more dangerous on a number of levels. While they may still use the smash tactics to gain entrance, they are not about to dash. While there they are going to have a look around and pick and choose as to what they are going to take. More importantly, they know what they can get the most for and that is what they will go for. Unlike Smashers, Prowlers usually have extensive criminal connections to channel stolen goods for the most money.

Furthermore, prowlers also tend to be a little more sly about the ways that they gain entry. The higher level ones are who often take measures to disguise their actions by pretending to be delivery or repair people. Prowlers often carry tools. Why make a lot of noise kicking a door in when with a pry bar you can gain entry faster and with less noise? Better yet, just slide an unlocked window open or come in through an unlocked door?

Such criminals know the common tricks of hiding valuables in the freezer, your underwear drawer or under the mattress. So they will go through certain rooms thoroughly while basically ignoring others. Unfortunately, what constitutes thoroughly can mean that they literally "trash" everything in the place, taking out drawers, and dumping their contents on the floor, strewing the contents of upper shelves in closets across the room and tossing items about with disregard for breakage. They will ransack your house to get what they want, some even will intentionally vandalize. The destruction they cause is often more traumatic to the victim than the actual theft itself.

Another important thing is that they often know the normal response time of security companies. So they know how long they can spend in a home they are burglarizing. That means they are in and out of your house *in under 10 minutes* -- still under the time the police or most security companies can respond. This need for speed is often the cause for the amount of damage the criminals do looting your home.

In case you are wondering how much they can pillage in such a short time, let us put things in perspective. How many suitcases and pillowcases do you have in your house? Often they will fill these up. Remember, they know where people typically hide things and what it is they are looking for. Instead of going through your jewelry box piece by piece, they will just dump it en mass into a suitcase.

Often prowlers work in teams. One does the break in and pillaging. He stacks items by the door. Another, possibly two or three, are in a car in the neighborhood. When the house is picked clean, the car pulls up, they quickly load the vehicle and drive away. Another way to keep from getting caught is one burglar breaks in, phones his partner on the cell, then opens the garage door, his partner pulls in and they close the garage door again. Thereby hiding the car or van while they load up. Perhaps the worst version is if you have a vehicle in your garage and a set of spare keys on a key hook. They drive away with all your stuff in your own vehicle.

Unfortunately, Prowlers have discovered a very lucrative side business: Identity theft. Most are no longer interested in large electronics. With one sweep of their arm all your credit card information, passports, bank statements, car title, spare keys and even the deed to your home goes into a pillowcase. They'll sort it out later. The amount of money they can make there either by selling your information or using it themselves, far outstrips the amount they can make from a TV. Similarly, laptops, cellphones, personal electronics and software are just as choice targets as jewelry for these kinds of burglars. This is another reason to back up everything on your computer and video tape the contents of your home.

What makes these people more dangerous is that they are not afraid. It takes serious nerve to calmly invade and stay in someone's home until it is picked clean. Because they are not afraid, they can also become far more aggressive if surprised. This is why if you find you have been burglarized, go back outside, call the police and *DO NOT* re-enter your home without them.