

HOME SECURITY

Keeping your home secure is not hard to do. Most home security strategies are easy and don't cost a lot of money. When you think about home security take your house, yard and even your neighborhood into account. Pay close attention to the vulnerable areas. A good rule of thumb is if you can break into your home without much trouble, then so can a burglar!

Neighbors who work together at keeping their properties neat and well maintained send a silent but strong message that they care about what happens on their street. Take a look at your neighborhood as a burglar might see it and decide if it gives you a sense of safety and well being.

Also consider how your neighbors interact with one another. When neighbors talk to each other, barriers are broken down, people feel safer and there is more willingness to work together. A good observant neighbor can be a great deterrent to crime.

Answer the following questions and see how your street measures up. The more questions that are answered 'yes', the safer the street.

1. Do you and your neighbors trim back trees when they are overgrown and hinder street illumination?
2. Is your street free from litter and garbage?
3. Are sidewalks maintained?
4. Do you call the police about abandoned cars in your neighborhood?
5. Do your neighbors look out for each other?
6. Do you leave an extra house key with a trusted neighbor instead of under a mat or other hiding place that can easily be discovered?
7. Do you have an active block watch to help communication among neighbors?
8. Do your neighbors watch your home when you are away?

Consider having summer cookout/pot luck dinner with your neighbors to make new friendships, exchange information, and maintain a spirit of cooperation.

IN THE YARD

Now let's take a look around the outside of your home. Help define your yard so people can tell where private property begins. Bordering your lawn - or for that matter, a well-kept lawn - can help. And don't hide your house. Secluded, dark property concealed by shrubbery or solid fencing is a burglar's delight. So brighten up the outside, especially doorways, and clear away excess foliage. Light up what you need to protect - the house itself. Weigh the difference between a moderate amount of privacy and creating a fortress where no one can see out and no one can see in. Keeping your property visible goes a long way in keeping it safe.

1. If a fence protects your property, is it chain link or post and rail so as to eliminate hiding places and increase your view?
2. As an alternative to fencing, do you use low bushes or shrubs to help define your property?
3. Are the shrubs and hedges around your yard and next to the house trimmed back to allow visibility and eliminate hiding places?
4. Are tree limbs near the house trimmed back to eliminate climbing and gaining entrance to the second floor or roof?
5. Is your property free from large areas of darkness and shadows?
6. Do you use floodlights to illuminate your property?
7. Do you light up the outer areas of your yard (i.e. walkways) so people are visible as soon as they enter your property?
8. Do you control your outside lights with either automatic timers, photoelectric cells, or motion detectors?

THE OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE

How's the security on your house itself? Securing the exterior of the house is a very important element toward preventing a burglary. The condition and quality of windows, doors and locks have the biggest impact on how easy it is to break in. If doors are left unlocked or are easy to defeat, a burglar will find your home very attractive. You can have the best and most sophisticated locks available but if you don't use them, it amounts to having none at all.

More people are using alarms these days. If you are considering having a system installed, it's best to use a dealer who will come to your home and discuss the options most appropriate for you. You should also get more than one estimate before you purchase any alarm system.

Doors

1. Are all of your exterior doors made of either 1 3/4 inch solid wood or metal?
2. If you have exterior doors with windows in them, have you installed polycarbonate over the glass panels near the lock?
3. Is the door frame secure enough to provide no movement when you push against it?
4. Do your solid exterior doors have 180 degree, wide-angle viewers to allow for visual identification of people without having to open the door?
5. Are sliding glass doors protected with a secondary lock, such as a "charlie bar" or a slide bolt? Also, these doors would be installed in a manner as to prevent them from being lifted out of the track.
6. Are exterior basement doors made of metal or solid wood and protected with a deadbolt?
7. Are hatchway (bilco) doors secured with a sliding bolt?
8. Are garage doors leading into the house made of solid wood and secured with a dead bolt?
9. Are doors on outbuildings, such as garages and shed, adequately protected?

10. Are overhead garage doors secured with a padlock, deadbolt lock, or electronic door opener?

Windows and Locks

1. Do you lock your double-hung windows with sliding bolts or window locks and not rely on the crescent latch which only keeps the bottom and top sashes closed?
2. Are the safety latches in your casement windows working properly with no play in the crank handles?
3. Are all panels of glass in your louvered windows or doors glued with epoxy to prevent removal?
4. Are your sliding glass doors secured with "charlie bars" or sliding bolts?
5. Do you secure your basement windows with grillwork, bars, mesh, or polycarbonate? (A note to remember, if you are considering any of these safety methods, take into account those windows that are or could be needed for emergency exits.)
6. Are the air conditioners bolted into the window from the inside?
7. If you have a solid core exterior door, does it have a single cylinder deadbolt lock that uses a key on one side and a turn-knob on the other?
8. If you have an exterior door that has a half-glass window, does it have a double cylinder deadbolt lock that uses a key on both sides?
9. Do you use a deadbolt lock on all exterior doors?

In the House

Lastly, what does the inside of your house tell a burglar? Burglaries usually happen when no one is at home. So it's important to make the house look "lived in" - or as if someone is there. You can use several visual cues to achieve this.

1. Are some of your inside lights on automatic timers so the house never looks dark and empty?
2. Are your shades or curtains drawn in the evening so those passersby cannot see your belongings?
3. Do you leave a radio or television on while out, so that sound is emanating from the house?
4. Do you rent a safety deposit box to store valuables that you do not often use?
5. Do you engrave items such as television, computers, VCRs, etc. with your name or some other form of identification?
6. If you have a safe at home is it appropriate for what you are protecting (fire safe for documents, money safe for cash and small valuables)?

Consider making a video tape of the entire contents of your home and describe items and their value/identifying characteristics as you record. Keep the tape in a safety deposit box or other off-site location. Along with a video tape compile a written inventory of your valuables including the Make, Model and Serial Number. Have a phone close to your bed should you need to summon help at night.

One of the most important safety steps you can take is to have your HOUSE NUMBER CLEARLY DISPLAYED so that in time of need Emergency Services can locate your house no matter the time of day or night. Provide the dispatcher with the nearest cross street to your house to further aid in your home being quickly located.