

Secure your Home

Here are a few things you can do to improve your home security

- Don't leave notes on your mailbox or your door.
- Illuminate as much of your property as you can.
- Use electric timers to maintain normal lighting even when you are away.
- While on vacation, have your mail and newspaper delivery stopped and have a neighbor ensure that promotional flyers don't collect in your mailbox.
- Arrange to have your grass cut or snow shoveled while absent.
- Leave a radio on or, even better, put the radio on an electric timer.
- Install motion detector lights for the perimeter and especially the back of your house. They illuminate only when movement is detected and can be set to function only after sunset. Burglars hate lights.

Keep Your Home Visible to Neighbors and Passers-by

- Keep your shrubbery (trees and gardens) cut back so that your house and perimeter are visible from the street. If possible don't use a fencing style that conceals your property. If you can't see out, others can't see in.
- Get to know your neighbors and their vehicles. Keep a look out for suspicious activity in your neighborhood.

Does your neighborhood have a watch program?

"Yes" Join the program.

"No" You may want to start one.

Make it As Difficult As Possible for Someone to Break In

- Secure window air conditioners from the inside.
- Secure any glass that is less than 40" (100cm) from a door lock.
- For wood frame windows, which open from below, drill a hole high in the frame through both windows and place a long double-headed nail in the hole to act as a bolt preventing the window from opening. You can drill another hole with the window slightly ajar to secure an opened draft window.
- Exterior doors should be solid not hollow. Better yet, get a metal or fiberglass door. These doors pay for themselves after a few years due to the insulation in them and the heating/cooling cost savings.
- Door hinges that are on the outside should have a non-removable center pin that can't be tampered with. Pin sliding patio doors when closed or construct a stop bar with a piece of wood.
- Place hinged security bars on basement windows remembering to keep the key or release tool nearby for emergency exits.
- Keep upper-level windows closed and locked.

Avoid keeping large amounts of cash and jewelry in your house. Burglars are looking for cash and easy-to-carry things they can turn into cash quickly: jewelry, silver, cameras and other electronic devices. Keep small "luxury" items locked in a safe or well hidden in a non-obvious area of your home. TVs, VCRs, computers, and stereos get their attention too. Consider investing in a simple table/desk bolt for stereos, computers and VCRs. Make it difficult to pick these items up.

Get an alarm system installed but don't rely on the alarm system alone; continue to implement the other security measures included on this information page. If you can't afford an alarm system, buy a fake sticker and stick them on all doors and windows.

Other Hints

- Identify your personal property by engraving or permanently marking it. Put a sticker on your doors to the effect that your property has been engraved.
- Put a "BEWARE OF DOG" sign on your back fence or door, even if you don't have a dog.
- Hide valuables in unusual places.
- Tell your neighbors when you are leaving on a long vacation. You can return the favor.
- Don't use your home address on luggage tags. Use your work address instead.
- Don't leave valuables in plain view from the front door, such as wallets, cash or purses.
- Lock your doors when you are at the other end of your home or yard.
- Keep the phone number of the police and other emergency personnel by the telephone.

Common Home Security Mistakes

Whether or not you have a home security system, there are some common mistakes that you should watch out for because they can make your house an easy mark for thieves. Browse through the following no-no's and make sure you are not guilty of committing any of them. (If you are, for your own safety and for the security of your home, correct them immediately.)

Common Home Security Mistakes:

Hide-a-key

Many homeowners, afraid they will lose their keys and lock themselves out, choose to hide a key somewhere on the property. They think they are being sneaky by placing the key under a rock, under a doormat, in a potted plant, or above the door. Burglars absolutely know about all these commonly used hiding places. Under no circumstances should you leave the key to your house where it can be found. If you frequently lose your keys or lock yourself out of the house, consider getting a fingerprint or keypad door lock for your front door.

Broken Locks

Some homeowners neglect to fix broken locks right away, putting the job off until tomorrow (or whenever they feel like it). It is important, however, to make sure all your doors and windows have strong modern locks that are in good repair. Don't think that just because a window is on a second or third story that a burglar can't figure out a way to get to it.

Burglar Alarms That Aren't Turned On

A home security system is only useful when updated and activated. Test your alarm on a regular basis and check for any upgrades to the software. And don't forget to turn it on when you leave the house, even if you're just planning to run an errand. A single thief can utterly ransack your house in just a few minutes.

Untamed Landscaping

Though you may like the idea of privacy, ultimately your home will be more secure if neighbors can see into your front and back yard. Burglars love to hide behind bushes and shrubbery; don't give them that opportunity. Keep the foliage trimmed, especially around the house, and make sure all the outdoor lights are in good working order (even better, install motion or body heat-sensing outdoor lights).

Unlocked Storage Sheds

If you have a storage shed, make sure you keep it locked at all times, because otherwise you're offering thieves free use of all your tools which can certainly help them figure out a way into your home. Also, make sure you don't leave a ladder laying out in your yard anywhere. Someone could use this to gain access to the second-story windows.

Keys in the Car

It's bad enough if you leave your car unlocked (you shouldn't, even in the garage), but never leave a set of house keys in the car. If you do, a burglar who gains access to your car will also have access to your house.