

Home Security: Invest In It Now

If you were locked out of your house, would you still be able to get in? Maybe you keep an unlocked window in the back, or a hidden key in your mailbox or on top of a window ledge?

You may think this is a good idea, but guess what? If you can break in, so can a burglar!

One out of ten homes will be burglarized this year. For a small amount of time and money you can make your home more secure and reduce your chances of being a victim.

Many burglars will spend no longer than 60 seconds trying to break into a home. Good locks - and good neighbors who watch out for each other - can be big deterrents to burglars.



Check the locks

Did you know that in almost half of all completed residential burglaries, thieves simply breezed in through unlocked doors or crawled through unlocked windows?

- Make sure every external door has a sturdy, well-installed dead bolt lock. Key-in-the-knob locks alone are not enough.
- Sliding glass doors can offer easy access if they are not properly secured. You can secure them by installing commercially available locks or putting a broomstick or dowel in the inside track to jam the door. To prevent the door being lifted off the track, drill a hole through the slide door frame and the fixed frame. Then insert a pin in the hole.
- Lock double-hung windows with key locks or "pin" your windows by drilling a small hole into a 45 degree angle between the inner and outer frames, then insert a nail that can be removed. Secure basement windows with grilles or grates.
- Instead of hiding keys around the outside of your home, give an extra key to a neighbor you trust.
- When you move into a new house or apartment, re-key the locks.

Check the doors

A lock on a flimsy door is about as effective as locking your car door but leaving the window down.

- All outside doors should be metal or solid wood.
- If your doors don't fit tightly in their frames, install weather stripping around them.
- Install a peephole or wide angle viewer in all entry doors so you can see who is outside without opening the door. Door chains break easily and don't keep out intruders.

Check the outside

Look at your house from the outside. Make sure you know the following tips.

- Thieves hate bright lights. Install outside lights and keep them on at night.
- Keep your yard clean. Prune back shrubbery so it doesn't hide doors or windows. Cut back tree limbs that a thief could use to climb to an upper-level window.
- If you travel, create the illusion that you're at home by getting some timers that will turn lights on and off in different areas of your house throughout the evening. Lights burning 24 hours a day signal an empty house.
- Leave shades, blinds, and curtains in normal positions. And don't let your mail pile up! Call the post office to stop delivery or have a neighbor pick it up.
- Make a list of your valuables - VCRs, stereos, computers, jewelry. Take photos of the items, list their serial numbers and description. Check with law enforcement about engraving your valuables through Operation

Identification.

- Ask local law enforcement for a free home security survey.

Consider an Alarm

Alarms can be a good investment, especially if you have many valuables in your home, or live in an isolated area or one with a history of break-ins.

- Check with several companies before you buy so you can decide what level of security fits your needs. Do business with an established company and check references before signing a contract.
- Learn how to use your system properly! Don't "cry wolf" by setting off false alarms. People will stop paying attention and you'll probably be fined.
- Some less expensive options... a sound-detecting socket that plugs into a light fixture and makes the light flash when it detects certain noises, motion sensing outdoor lights that turn on when someone approaches, or lights with photo cells that turn on when it's dark and off when it's light.

Burglars Do More Than Steal

Burglars can commit rape, robbery, and assault if they are surprised by someone coming home or pick a home that is occupied.

- If something looks questionable - a slit screen, a broken window or an open door - don't go in. Call the police from a neighbor's house or a public phone.
- At night, if you think you hear someone breaking in, leave safely if you can, then call the police. If you can't leave, lock yourself in a room with a phone and call the police. If an intruder is in your room, pretend you are asleep.
- Gun are responsible for many accidental deaths in the home every year. If you choose to own a gun, learn how to store it and use it safely.

There's More You Can Do

- Join a Neighborhood Watch group. If one doesn't exist, you can start one with help from local law enforcement.
- Never leave a message on your answering machine that indicates you may be away from home now, say "I'm not available right now."
- Work with neighbors and local government to organize community clean-ups. The cleaner your neighborhood, the less attractive it is to crime.