

## SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME

For most of us, especially seniors, life centers on our home. It is where we go to feel safe and secure. However, burglars can take this security away from us. According to the statistics, most break-ins occur in the daytime, are committed by teenagers, and are crimes of opportunity when no one is home. You do not have to be wealthy to be robbed. Burglars are looking for anything they can turn into cash. We all have something of value. Seniors are especially vulnerable since many live alone and typically have valuables that are easy to fence.

If a burglar really wants to get in, there is no easy way to completely stop him. However, burglars want to get in quickly, with no noise, and not be seen. If your home is well defended, he might go look for easier prey elsewhere.

### A. OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

Burglars want to be inconspicuous and not be seen. By taking away places he can hide, you can make a burglar want to go elsewhere.

- Trim all shrubs so they do not provide a hiding place, and make sure all doors and windows are clearly visible.
- Install motion activated flood lights.
- Petition to have more street lights put in.
- Do not have outbuildings that cast shadows or obscure the view of entry points to your home.
- Have bright porch lights and peep holes.
- Participate (or organize) a neighborhood watch and post signs
- Put up signs that you have a security system (even if you don't have one).

### B. INSIDE YOUR HOME

Most burglars prefer an empty house. So make your house look occupied, even when you are gone. Timers can be used to turn lights, radios, TVs, etc., on and off. New timers can be variable, or even random, rather than operating only at set times. If you are gone for an extended period, be sure to stop newspapers, get the yard maintained, and have a neighbor collect your mail, and other materials left at your door.

### C. POINTS OF ENTRY

If a burglar tries your home, then what happens? Law enforcement statistics indicate that, most of the time, burglars simply enter through an unlocked door or window. The first suggestion is **LOCK THE DOORS AND WINDOWS**. Lock every thing, including closing the overhead garage door even if you are just going to work in the yard. Time is the burglar's enemy. Anything that will slow him down may cause him to go elsewhere.

Suggestions to protect the common points of entry are:

- Exterior Doors are often a preferred point of entry, since the burglar looks more normal standing by a door than a window. To slow the crook down
  - Use a door of solid wood core construction, or, better yet, a metal door and frame.

- Have deadbolt locks, with a one inch throw minimum.
- Hinges should be on the inside of the door.
- Lock the door and do not hide keys around the outside of the house.
- Do not put your name on your keys. If you take your car to be serviced, do not have your house keys on the key ring with your car keys.
- Windows should always be locked or pinned. This is especially true of basement windows which are often hidden from view. Commercially available pins, nails, or bolts prevent the window from being raised, even if the window is broken.
- Patio Doors have the weakness of both doors and windows. To slow the burglar down
  - Install locking pins which go through the doors into the frames.
  - Place a thick dowel or angle iron in the bottom track.
  - Put shims on the top of the frames to prevent the sliding door from being lifted from the frame.
- Attached garages are full of stuff to steal. They also provide a safe, hidden location the burglar can use to enter the house.
  - Cover the windows so he can't see what's inside.
  - Keep it locked. Use a good quality padlock when away.
  - Some burglars have a "cloning" device that will open older automatic garage doors. Newer ones protect against this.
  - Use a solid core exterior door, with a quality deadbolt lock, for the entry into the house.

#### D. ALARM SYSTEMS

The burglar wants to be invisible, not to be noticed. A lot of noise from an alarm is one of his worst nightmares. As noted earlier, sometimes just a sign will be enough of a deterrent. Unmonitored systems are loud and obnoxious, designed to draw attention to the home. If ignored, they do nothing, but if you arrange with a neighbor to call police, they are effective. Monitored alarm systems are very effective, but require a monthly fee. The company automatically calls your house if the system is breached. If no one answers, or the person answering doesn't know the code word, the police are called. Ask your local law enforcement agency what to look for and obtain several quotes from reputable dealers before selecting one. However, remember these systems do not reduce the need for adequate locks or the other practices noted earlier.

#### E. THE BURGLAR SUCCEEDS. NOW WHAT?

If you have been burgled, you will probably not see your stolen property again. The recovery rate is very low. However, there are some actions you can take now to help with any settlement from an insurance company.

- Have current lists and photos or videotapes of your possessions. (Also a help in times of natural disaster.)
- Mark your valuables with an engraver or an ultra-violet pen. If anything is recovered, this will help you get it back, and can be used as evidence against the burglar.
- Get a fireproof safe for the lists/photos/videos and any small family heirlooms or high value items. Burglars do not like safes. Safes slow them down.

Remember, if someone really wants to get into your home, they can and will. What you want to do is make it harder for them, and slow them down. Time is a burglar's enemy. If your home looks too difficult, they may give up and go look for an easier target.

*Written by : Chuck Joseph TRIAD*

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