

HOME SECURITY TIPS

Most residential burglaries are crimes of opportunity. Criminals look for easy targets where the risk of detection is low. Chances are good you can lower the burglary appeal at your home by improving security. The more you do to keep your home from looking like an easy mark, the greater your chances of avoiding a break-in. The National Sheriffs' Association recommends following the three D's of burglary prevention:

Deter—Use security measures and good locks as deterrents, since they eliminate the opportunity for an easy burglary.

Detect—Force burglars to work where they can be observed to increase the possibility of detection. No burglar wants to draw attention by breaking glass or smashing doors. Alarms on doors and windows are the best way to detect a burglar, but alert neighbors who will notify law enforcement about unusual activity are also an effective means of detection.

Delay—Burglars want to avoid being caught, so the longer it takes to force a door or window, the greater the risk. It is nearly impossible to make a house or apartment impregnable, but it's relatively easy and inexpensive to delay a burglar by making forced entry difficult. Delaying a burglar for four minutes is generally considered sufficient to prevent entry into a residence.

If you can cause a criminal to take more time, make more noise and be more visible, you might prevent completion of a crime or deter the attempt altogether. Your first step will be to take a hard look at your property to assess what areas provide easy entry for a prospective burglar.

Use the above principles of deterrence, detection and delay to inspect security at your home. Survey entry points including all doors and windows. Inspect locks, lights and landscaping, both in the daytime and at night. Copy our Home Inspection Checklist to locate weaknesses around your home, then take steps to correct them using the guidelines that follow.

Crime prevention begins at home. Take a proactive approach to avoid becoming a victim instead of reacting after a burglar has made off with your valuables.

Exterior Doors

Entry door: Hinged doors are most commonly used as entry doors in houses and apartments. Make sure your exterior hinged doors are made of solid core construction (1-3/4-thick wood) or metal clad. Hollow-core or composition board doors can be easily battered or bored, resulting in less protection. Doors with glass panels should be replaced, reinforced so they can't be shattered or have a decorative grille installed over the glass using non-removable screws. If you install a doggie door, be sure it won't be an entryway for burglars as well as the dog.

Exterior doors should be installed with their hinges inside. An improperly installed door can be lifted from its outside hinges by pulling the hinge pins. Follow the steps below to avoid this:

1. Remove two screws opposite each other in both leaves of the top and bottom hinges.
2. Insert a screw or concrete nail into the screw hole of each jamb leaf. Leave ½" protruding from the hole. Cut off the screw head.
3. Drill out the opposing screw hole in the door so that the unexposed screw fits into the door. When the door is closed after this procedure is performed, it will remain firmly in place even if the hinge pins are removed.

A wrought iron security door installed over your front door offers the greatest protection, providing a visible security deterrent and added delay to discourage burglars. A secure wrought iron door also allows you to open your front door to strangers or leave the door open for ventilation.

Every entry door should have good lighting and a wide-angle door viewer that allows you to see who is outside without opening the door.

Garage door: Keep your garage door locked at all times (even when you're at home), especially if the garage is attached to your house. Burglars who gain entry into a garage are less visible and can work relatively uninterrupted while getting into the house. Doors from the garage into the house should be solid core with secure locks.

Sliding glass doors: Burglars like these doors because they're easy to open and are usually located in areas that are more secluded than other entry doors. Standard locks on most arcadia doors can easily be pried open and should be supplemented using methods such as those below to improve security.

1. Adjust track clearances so doors can't be pushed or lifted out of their tracks.
2. Insert sheet metal screws in the track above the removable part of the door so the top of the door barely clears underneath them when it is operated.
3. Place wooden rods or metal bars snugly in the bottom track of the closed door to prevent the door from opening even if the lock is jimmied or removed.
4. Install a deadlock that uses a bore pin tumbler cylinder operable by a key from the outside. The lock bolt should engage the strike sufficiently enough to keep the bolt from disengaging by any amount of movement. Use an inside cylinder pull to replace an existing pull to accommodate a new deadlock.

Windows

Ground-Floor Windows: All ground-floor windows should be kept closed and locked when you're away. Screens and storm windows should be securely fastened to the structure. Keep basement windows closed and locked. Any basement window not required for ventilation or emergency exit can be secured by nailing through the window frame into the structure.

Upper-Floor Windows: Lock all upper windows while you're away. Secure second-floor windows by trimming tree branches away from the house to prevent access. Don't store ladders where a burglar has access to use them. Follow the steps below to enhance security of all windows.

Because burglars often enter homes by simply breaking glass windows, install glass products such as those discussed below in vulnerable windows around your house.

1. Laminated glass consisting of a vinyl or plastic interlayer between two layers of glass adds window strength. Laminates must be hit repeatedly in the same spot to make even a small hole, presenting a definite time and noise deterrent for a burglar.
2. Wired glass requires extra time and effort to first break the glass and then cut through the wire.
3. Tempered glass, which is made by placing a piece of glass in an oven, heating it almost to melting and then chilling it rapidly, results in a product that is four to five times stronger than regular glass.
4. Plastic windows include acrylics (commonly called Plexiglas), which are more than 10 times stronger than regular glass of the same thickness, and polycarbonates, which are advertised as 250 times more impact resistant than safety glass.

Double-hung sash windows can be protected with a key-locking security sash lock mounted with two- or three-inch screws. These locks offer added security but can also be a fire hazard unless a key is kept readily available. For a less expensive alternative, drill downward-slanting holes through the top corners of the inside sash and into the outside sash. Insert easy-to-remove nails through the holes to prevent the window from being raised. A second set of holes can be made with the window open less than four inches to allow for ventilation.

Casement windows that open with a gear-operating handle can be secured by removing the crank handle from the opening mechanism when away from home.

Louvered windows are a high security risk that should be replaced or covered with a protective grille or screen (except bedrooms).

Storm windows and screens offer some additional protection for all windows if properly secured.

Do not leave open doors and windows unattended when you're away or asleep, even if they're secured. Consider installing heavy-gauge metal grilles attached with non-removable or inside screws to protect particularly vulnerable windows (except bedroom windows).

WARNING: One window in every bedroom on the ground and second floors should be left available as a fire exit. A bedroom window often is the quickest and safest route of getting out, especially at night. Because of the danger of fire, decorative grilles and key-locking devices are not recommended on bedroom windows.

Locks, Strike Plates and Hinges

Doorknobs with built-in locks are convenient but can be opened using a credit card. Therefore, it's best to invest in strong, reliable locks for effective home security. Use quality keyed locks on all exterior doors, as well as an accompanying deadbolt. Deadbolt essentials include:

1. A bolt that extends at least one inch into the front edge of the door when in the locked position.
2. Hardened steel construction to prevent the bolt from being sawed off and a rotation case-hardened shroud that prevents twisting off with pliers or other tools.
3. A reinforced strike plate with at least three-inch screws to anchor the lock effectively.

Single-cylinder deadbolts have a thumb turn on the interior side, making them convenient and easy to open in the event of an emergency exit. However, a door with easily breakable glass within 40 inches of this type of deadbolt can be opened by breaking the window and reaching through. In this case, reinforced glass or plastic should be installed for added security.

Double-cylinder deadbolts use keys on both sides, making them a good choice for doors with glass within 40 inches of the lock. These deadbolts pose a safety risk during a fire or other emergencies requiring a quick exit unless keys are readily available.

Types of locks and bolts include:

1. Auxiliary Deadbolt: A one-inch single-cylinder deadbolt with a hardened cylinder guard and thumb turn.
2. Rim Lock: A less expensive but equally secure one-inch deadbolt installed on the inside door surface.
3. "Jimmy Proof" Rim Lock: An approved inside-mounted lock with vertical dead bolts.
4. Cane Bolt: A half-barrel slide bolt measuring one-half inch by 12 inches that often is installed at the top and bottom of the inactive door in homes with paired doors. These are considered to be weak and inadequate for proper security.

5. Flush bolt: Bolts installed at the top and bottom of the inactive door in a pair. These bolts provide additional security because an intruder can't get to these devices to tamper with them if the doors are locked.

Alarm Systems

You should think about installing an alarm system if you keep a lot of valuables (jewelry, televisions and other electronic equipment), are gone for long periods of time, or live in an isolated location or a location with a history of break-ins.

Because noise is a burglar's enemy, an audible alarm is recommended for residential use rather than a silent alarm. Many good residential alarm systems are available. To find the one that's best for you, investigate as many different types of systems and brands as you can. Ask friends and neighbors who have alarms what system they recommend. Choose the level of security that fits your needs, and then check with established companies (preferably in business three to five years). Obtain estimates from three companies. Check references, review the warranty, ask whether the alarm will be monitored locally or outside the state and read the contract carefully before signing it. Choose a system that has:

1. A battery-powered fail-safe backup.
2. Fire-sensing capability.
3. Read-out ability to check whether the system is working.
4. A sounding device installed through an attic vent.

Once you've chosen a system, learn how to use it properly to avoid false alarms.

No matter what system you choose, don't depend on it entirely for protection. Be sure to use properly locking devices on doors and windows. Protect smaller personal valuables further by using a safe or installing a one-inch deadbolt on a hinging closet door (be sure to "pin" the hinges), then store jewels, furs, cameras, guns, silverware and other valuables behind this barrier.

Exterior and Interior Lighting

Proper lighting can be one of the most effective and least costly deterrents to criminal activity. Indoor lighting gives the appearance that someone is home; outdoor lighting eliminates hiding spots, making it harder for a burglar to enter your home without being seen.

Exterior: Protect all sides of your home with lighting that has been positioned high enough so the bulbs cannot be removed or broken. All entryways, as well as porches and carports or garages, should have ample lighting, with some lights aimed away from the house so you can see when someone approaches.

Consider motion-sensing outdoor lights that turn on when someone approaches or lights with photo sensors that turn on when it's dark and off when it's light. Motion sensors are especially good in the backyard, where bulb lighting alerts you to movement in your yard. You can adjust the light's sensor to eliminate triggering by birds and small animals, thus avoiding "false alarms."

If you have a garage, choose an automatic door opener with an interior light that comes on when the door is activated. Those with carports should leave a light on, place a light on a timer or install motion-sensor lights that provide good coverage of the area.

Interior: When you're away from home, whether for the evening or while on vacation, leave lights on in different rooms of the house, along with a television or radio. These can be put on timers, set to go on and off, to give the appearance that someone is home. Your main objective is to make it look as though the house is occupied.

Landscaping and Yard Security

Houses surrounded by trees and shrubs make ideal targets for burglars because they provide the concealment burglars need to do their job. To eliminate hiding spaces, keep doorways, windows and porches clear when planting trees, bushes and flowers. Keep trees and shrubs trimmed so windows and doors are visible from the street:

Shrubby and bushes planted within four feet of sidewalks, driveways and gates should be kept no more than two feet high. Plants growing four and eight feet from these locations should be trimmed to no more than four feet.

Keep ground plants beneath windows pruned to a height below window level.

Prune trees to eliminate limbs lower than six feet off the ground or limbs that would provide access to second-story windows. Do not place trellises where they could be used to gain entry to upper floors.

Large-grade gravel spread below windows provides a noise deterrent, but avoid using large rocks that could be used to break window glass to gain entrance. Thorny plants placed under windows and along fences can also keep intruders away.

Use walkways and landscaping to direct visitors toward main entrances and away from private, more concealed areas. Fences, while providing some concealment, can also keep burglars from removing large items and increase the difficulty of breaking in. Always keep gates locked.

Store ladders and tools in a locked garage or storage shed to keep burglars from using them to gain access to your home. Keep gates locked with workable high-security padlocks.

Street Numbers

Post your house number so it is easily visible from the street to save valuable time when emergency responders are dispatched to your home.

If you live in an area with sidewalks, paint your house number centered at the end of your driveway. Four- to six-inch-high black numbers on a white background are most effective. In areas without sidewalks, post your house number using six-inch-high black or white reflective materials placed under a light near the front door or garage entrance.

No matter which method you use, keep numbers new and clean. Replace or repaint when necessary.

Key Storage

Nearly half of all burglaries take place without forced entry because a key has fallen into the wrong hands. To avoid this:

1. Never carry identification on your key ring or holder.
2. Re-key all locks when you move into a new house or apartment.
3. Never hid a key outside.
4. Do not hang keys on hooks within plain view inside your home.
5. Know who has keys to your home. If you leave a key behind (i.e., when you go on vacation) leave it with a trusted family member, friend or neighbor. Make sure all family members know where their keys are.

Personal Inventory List

Keep a Personal Inventory List of all valuables to help recover stolen property in the event of a theft or burglary. Store a copy in a safe, convenient location in your home (possibly with your insurance papers), as well as a copy in a safe deposit box or other location where it will be safe from destruction in the event of a fire.

The more complete the inventory the better. This includes a description of the item, the manufacturer model number, size, color, material, serial number, as well as any damage, marks or repairs. Take a picture of unusual items (paintings, jewelry, etc.) to keep with the list.

If you choose to mark or engrave your property with a personal number, use your Arizona driver's license number rather than your Social Security number.

If you hear or see signs of a burglar...

Burglars sometimes commit rapes, robberies and assaults when surprised by someone coming home or if they pick a home that turns out to be occupied.

1. If something looks questionable—an open door, a broken window or slit screen—don't go into your home. Call police from a neighbor's house or a public phone.
2. If you think you hear someone breaking in, leave safely if you can and then call police. If you can't leave, lock yourself in a room with a phone and call police. If an intruder is in your room, pretend you're asleep.
3. Guns are responsible for many accidental deaths in the home every year, so think carefully before buying a gun. If you do own one, learn how to store it and use it safely.