

# Protect Your Home From Break-Ins

Help protect your home from break-ins with these home security tips for alarms, lights, and locks.

By Joseph Saling



One of the easiest crimes to prevent -- burglary -- is also one of the most common. Somewhere in the U.S. there's a burglary committed every 15 seconds. If it happens at your home, you lose more than a few possessions. A break-in, even when you're not there, has a major impact on your and your family's sense of safety and well-being.

But burglaries don't have to happen. There are a lot of things you can do to boost home security and make your house burglary-resistant. Here are tips you can use to help you keep your family safe and your home and its contents intact.

## Anti-Burglary Tip No. 1: Don't Advertise You're Away

The first thing a burglar looks for when choosing a house for a break-in is one with no one in it. If you make your house look occupied when you're gone, most burglars will simply pass it by. Here are some ways to do that.

- Use automatic light timers throughout the house and have them turn on and off in a way that simulates your normal patterns. Look for light timers that have battery backup so the timer doesn't stop if there is a power failure. Using timers that have more than one on-off cycle can create the illusion of movement from room to room.
- The same kind of timers you use on lights can also be used to turn radios or TVs on and off.
- Consider using timed automatic drape and curtain openers. Drapes that are always closed or always open suggest no one is home.
- Turn the volume of your phone's ringer down so someone outside can't hear them ring.
- If you can, have your calls forwarded while you're away. Burglars sometimes call to see if anyone's home before a break-in.
- Arrange to have your lawn cut or snow removed from your walks if you're going to be gone for a long period.

- Instead of stopping your mail and newspaper delivery, ask a neighbor to pick them up and hold them for you. Seeing deliveries being made makes a burglar think someone is at home.
- Ask a neighbor to use your trash can from time to time and to put it out at the curb and bring it back on trash day.
- Always park your car in the garage with the garage door closed when you are there. That way someone watching for patterns won't know your car isn't there when you're gone.
- In the interest of home security, never leave notes on the door. They just say to a burglar, "Come on in."

### **Anti-Burglary Tip No.2: Make It Hard to Break In**

The second thing burglars look for is easy access. The harder it is for a burglar to get in, the less likely you are to come back to a burglarized home.

- Never leave doors or windows unlocked, and never hide a key to your house outside where it can be easily found.
- Use solid core or metal doors that are secured with good quality deadbolt locks. Look for or ask the locksmith for door locks with an ANSI grade 1 rating. Deadbolt locks should have a horizontal bolt at least 1 inch long. With shorter bolts, a burglar can more easily use tools to spread the door frame and open the door.
- Consider using locks that have an internal anti-saw pin that makes it difficult for a thief to saw through the bolt with a hacksaw. Also, some locks come with an anti-drill feature using hardened steel chips inside the lock that will destroy a drill bit in case a burglar tries to drill through the lock.
- The casing, which is the outside housing of the lock, should be made out of hardened steel and be beveled. A hardened steel casing makes the lock more resistant to impact, and the beveling helps prevent a burglar from using a pipe wrench to twist the lock free.
- A metal strike plate is attached to the door jamb to hold the bolt or latch in place. The most common way for a thief to force a door open is to kick it open by kicking at the plate. You can make this harder by using a heavy four-screw high security strike plate. The wood screws used to attach it should be 3 inches long. That way, they will go through the jamb and be anchored in the door frame stud.

- Using at least one long screw in attaching each door hinge will further secure the door against forced entry.
- Treat a door between an attached garage and the house as an outside door and use the same type of locks that you use on the front and back door.
- Any window or glass panel in the door that is closer than 42 inches to the lock should be reinforced with an invisible security film so a burglar can't break the glass and reach through to unlock the door.
- Windows should be attached to a home security alarm and have locks that operate from the inside so they can be used for escape. Windows can also be made stronger and safer by coating them with an impact-resistant film.
- Another home security measure for windows is to install stops that prevent them from being opened more than 6 inches. If you do, though, everyone in the home needs to know how to remove the stops to make an emergency exit.
- Use a metal or wooden rod in the track on sliding glass patio doors to prevent them from sliding open.
- Never leave a ladder that can be used to access the roof or a second story window outside or in an unlocked shed.
- Cut back tree limbs that hang over the roof, and remove any lower branches from trees next to the home.

### **Anti Burglary Tip No. 3: Don't Make It Easy to Hide**

A burglar is more likely to try getting into a house where there is less chance of being seen. Taking away the robber's cover goes a long way toward protecting your house.

- Thieves can hide behind trees and shrubs. Trim back or remove any shrubbery next to doors or windows. If you are going to use plants next to the house, you should use thorny plants such as holly or roses.
- Use outside security lighting to illuminate every access door. The main entrance should be illuminated with a fixture that has two bulbs or with two fixtures in case one bulb burns out.
- Use exterior lighting with motion detectors for the yard, driveway and other outside regions. If lights come on when someone approaches, a burglar is less likely to try breaking into your home. Also, if the lights are activated by

motion rather than being left on all the time, your neighbors are more likely to notice if someone is moving around your house.

- Remember the back and side of your home offer some concealment for a burglar who is trying to break in. So pay close attention to securing all entrances, and if possible avoid installing a tall privacy fence since that offers even greater concealment.

#### **Anti Burglary Tip No. 4: Install a Home Security Alarm System**

Home security alarms are not a guarantee that burglars will not enter your home. But they do make it more difficult by increasing the risk that the burglar will be seen and caught. If it's obvious your house is alarmed, the burglar may look for an easier target.

- Be sure to use the yard sign and window decals that say your house is protected by a home security system.
- Regularly check to make sure the sign is visible and has not been covered up by shrubs or pulled out of the ground by pets or neighborhoods children.
- Choose a home security system that uses motion detectors as well as arms all windows and doors that could provide access.
- Also consider using glass-break sensors that set off the alarm at the sound of a window or glass door panel being broken. Some sensors also detect sudden shock waves and will set the alarm off if someone is trying to kick open the door.
- Never post your pass code next to or on the home security alarm key pad.

#### **Anti Burglary Tip No. 5: Get to Know Your Neighbors**

The best home security comes from neighbors who look out for one another. Make it a point to meet your neighbors so that you can ask them to keep an eye on things while you're away.

And if your neighborhood does not already have a neighborhood watch program, consider organizing one. Most local law enforcement agencies have people available who can help you plan and organize a watch program to keep not just your possessions safe, but your family as well.

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