

Home Security

Introduction

Most home burglaries are done by amateurs who spot a weakness and carryout quick "in and out" burglary lasting only a few minutes. At greatest risk are portable valuables that are easy to move on. However, if given the opportunity and time, such as knowing that the occupants are away (i.e. at work or on holiday) the thieves will take everything of value.

When planning home security think from the property boundary and work inwards. Also try and imagine how you would get into your house quickly and unseen if you had lost the key. This will help identify weaknesses.

Outside

Walls and solid fencing around your house may let a thief break in without being seen. Trees and shrubs close the building can also be hiding places. Chain-link or open fencing offers the ability to mark a boundary, without compromising visibility. Where privacy is a concern, consider using prickly hedging (such as hawthorn or pyracantha), which can be combined fencing panels.

Good external lighting is an effective deterrent; burglars don't like being seen. Particularly ensure that recessed areas and doorways are lit. PIR activated lighting that comes on when movement is advised as when the light comes on, this acts as an alarm. Whilst these will impose running costs, this can be reduced by using low power LED/solar powered LED lights.

Make sure that garden tools or ladders that could be used to force entry into your home are not left lying around for the burglar to use.

Windows

Protect your windows with one or more good locks, an alarm system, and burglar-resistant glass. Consider using laminated safety glass at ground level. Double glazing offers more protection than single pane.

Do not display valuables in the window, and be conscious of what can be seen through the windows from the outside.

Doors

Change all the locks and tumblers when you move into a new house, or if you lose the keys.

External doors should open inwards so that the hinges are on the inside and protected from tampering. External doors should have three hinges (top, middle, bottom). This prevents the door bowing under force.

Use 5 lever deadlock mortice locks (BS3621) and security bolts giving three points of security (top, centre and bottom).

Fit a door viewer so that you can identify visitors before opening the door, with an external light for use in the hours of darkness.

Use a security chain when opening the door to visitors you do not know and check their identity before releasing the chain.

Property

Keep valuables out of sight from casual observation from the outside.

Security mark property, record any serial numbers, and keep photographs of valuables. This makes it easier for the police to recover stolen items.

Consider using a safe for high value items such as personal documents and jewellery.

Always draw your curtains at night and make sure valuable items cannot be easily seen from outside.

Visitors

Ask for credentials from any sales-person who requests entry to your home. Use the security chain, or ask for the ID to be pushed through the letter box. Many professional burglars use this cover to check out homes. If in doubt, do not let them in.

If someone comes to your door asking to use the phone to call a mechanic or the police, keep the door locked and make the call yourself.

Garages/Outbuildings

Be aware that attached outbuildings can represent a weak point. They can offer the burglar a covered approach, as well as access to tools to help them break in.

Security measures for attached outbuildings should therefore match those of the main property.

If you frost or cover your garage windows, burglars won't be able to tell if your car is gone.

Keep your garage door closed and locked even when your car is not in the garage.

Keep garden sheds and garages locked and think about using a battery-operated stand-alone alarm, or a wireless alarm linked to the house system.

Don't leave spare keys outside or in a garage or shed; no matter how clever you think a hiding place is, experienced burglars are adept at double guessing you. Leave a spare key with a neighbour or trusted friend.

Alarms

Consider installing an intruder (burglar) alarm system with a visible external alarm box. Alarms can offer a good visible deterrent. There are a variety of systems on the market, from DIY stand-alone systems, or hard-wired systems linked to an Alarm Monitoring Centre (AMC). When deciding what alarm to fit consideration should be given to:

- The cost should be balanced against the value of the property (some insurance providers offer discounts on premiums when an alarm is fitted).
- Consider the location of the property; is it isolated or in an urban housing development. This will effect reaction times from the police, any private security provider, or key holders/neighbours. The longer the response time, the less practicable a system linked to an AMC or other response it becomes.
- Wired monitored systems should meet BS4737, or wireless BS 6799.
- The running costs and charges, especially if the system is linked to an AMC.

The police response to their activation will be based on the assumption that an offence is taking place, but against any competing urgent calls and available resources. Such a response will also be

conditional upon the number of any previous false activations, in which case the activation may receive a lower priority police attendance.

Consider fitting locks or bolts to the main bedroom. This is to create a place of safety in the event of an intruder (it is very rare for a burglar to enter an occupied property, or attack occupants). Make sure that this room has some means of communication (telephone/mobile phone).

CCTV

There are many CCTV systems on the market aimed at the domestic market. Whilst they can be a deterrent, unless there is some form of monitoring and response, they are very much an “after the event system.” In addition, whilst a home owner is at liberty to set up cameras, if the cameras cover a public area, such as the street outside, the property owner will need to take into consideration privacy and data protection legislation.

In addition, before considering installing, some form of cost-benefit and risk analysis should be undertaken; in the domestic environment money should first be spent on good quality locks, windows and alarms.

If cameras are installed care should be taken over what is in their field of view, avoiding infringing on the privacy of neighbours. Cameras are best placed covering entrances and positioned so that they capture the face of any intruder.

Consideration should be given to the location of any recording equipment; having the recording device in the home puts it at risk from the burglar, on-line (cloud) storage is more secure.

One option that is gaining popularity is to install security cameras that use mobile phone technology to send a message and image to the owner when movement is detected. However, these systems require a SIM card subscription.

Personal Security

As a precaution against scams and bogus callers consider:

- Not being listed in the telephone directory.
- Not being listed in the publicly available version of the electoral roll.
- Be conscious of what entries you make on social networking sites, such as:
 - Personal details and photographs.
 - Home address or location.
 - Photographs of the property and its contents.
 - Details about trips away from home.
- Destroy any material that has your home address or personal details, such as envelopes, bills, bank statements, letters etc. before you throw them away.

Going Away

Burglars always look for signs that a house is uninhabited, and the longer the house is empty, the more vulnerable it becomes.

Your house should appear occupied at all times. Use timers to switch lights and radios on and off when you're not at home.

Lock up your home, even if you go out only for a short time. Many burglars just walk in through an unlocked door or window, spend a few minutes to grab any valuables and then get away.

Don't leave notes for service people or family members on the door. Also cancel papers, milk and other deliveries. These act as a welcome mat for a burglar.

Ask a neighbour to check the property each day to make sure everything is in order.

Further Advice

Whilst this advice is suitable for most homes, if you have high-value items, or consider yourself at especial risk, Doran Risk Consulting can provide expert practical advice.

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