

Security Tips

These days, just about everyone has a relative or acquaintance who has been burglarized.

In fact, statistics indicate that three out of four U.S. homes will be burglarized in the next 20 years. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the average property loss in a burglary exceeds \$1,000, not to mention the damage from vandalism.

Enhancing the security of your residence is much easier than you think. Keep in mind that the time you spend now may save you thousands of dollars in the long run.

There are generally three different types of burglars: the professional, the semi-professional and the amateur. Although the average homeowner will probably not have to face a professional thief who focuses on extremely valuable items, you need to be aware of semi-professional and amateur burglars. **Residential burglars are often male teenagers who live near your home.** They are opportunists who look for easy targets. If the risk of detection is too high, the average burglar will not attempt to enter your home.



Burglars know that the key to success is planning. The semi-professional burglar may scout a neighborhood for up to a week, while the amateur burglar will spend only a few hours “casing” a residence. After determining his target, the average burglar spends just a few minutes burglarizing it. Whether you leave your home for five minutes or five weeks, recognize that it’s vulnerable whenever it’s unoccupied. While you cannot be home all of the time, you can devise a home security program that works for you around the clock.

Current Security Measures

The first step in making your home secure is to evaluate your current security measures. **Contact your local Police Dept. to arrange for a free security inspection.** You can also ask your family and friends to pretend to be burglars and make their best attempts at entering your home. The objective of this exercise is to identify every vulnerable area of your home, so be thorough. If it is not difficult to find the key hidden under the flower pot, a burglar could locate it, too. Can you climb your oak tree and gain access to a second floor window? A limber thief could do the same. Darkness and shadows offer additional opportunities for burglars, so perform this exercise at night as well. Does your landscaping cover or cast a shadow on doors and windows? It could also conceal a thief at work. If you feel that your home is too bare without landscaping near your walls, consider growing low, thorny bushes near windows and doors. You also do not want to encourage burglars by making it obvious that you have valuables inside your residence. After your inspection, make a list of all potential trouble spots. Fortunately, there are simple, inexpensive solutions to most of your problems.



In Olympia Fields, you can contact Corp. Don Dean at 708-503-8101 or email ddean@olympia-fields.com to arrange a free security assessment of your property.

Your Home Design

Whether you are searching for a new home or have been living in the same house for many years, there are several things that you should know about your residence's design and how it affects your security.

Two-story, single-family homes are usually not a burglar's first choice. If the master bedroom (usually the first stop) is on the second floor, he could be trapped. But a two-story home does not guarantee your security. The first floor is the typical entry point, and you need reliable locks on all windows and doors. If you have a two-story home or live on a higher floor of an apartment or condominium building, easily climbed tree limbs or an unlocked fire escape could provide easy access for a burglar. Single-family homes in the middle of a block are much more likely to be burglarized than corner homes. Thieves tend to bypass corner houses because they are highly visible, making it more likely that they'll be spotted. So, if you live in the middle of a block, invest in outdoor lighting that increases your home's visibility and decreases a burglar's chances of success. Most townhouses have common features, such as sliding glass doors and small, discreetly fenced back yards, which make them easier to burglarize. In an attempt to provide privacy for each unit, their design also provides privacy for a thief. If you live in a townhouse, reinforce your sliding glass doors and consider using a motion-sensitive light in order to protect the vulnerable rear area of your residence. Cul-de-sacs require special precautions as well. Police drive through these neighborhoods less frequently than others, and cul-de-sacs often have wooded areas nearby, which create an ideal hiding place for an escaping thief. No matter where you live, ground floor windows need secure locks. Also make sure that balcony, patio and fire exits are equipped with sturdy doors and secure locks.

Your Neighborhood

Just as you performed a security check on your home, perform one on your neighborhood by exploring it. Is it well lighted? Does your community have a neighborhood watch program? Your neighbors play an important part in your overall burglary prevention program. When you are away, you trust that they will report any suspicious activity around your home. The security of their home is linked to the security of yours. If their home is not burglar-proof, then a burglar might spend more time evaluating your neighborhood. Burglars tend to avoid neighborhoods that are collectively security conscious. If your community doesn't have a neighborhood watch program, consider establishing one. An aware neighborhood is a safer neighborhood. Neighborhood watch groups and similar programs are often established in response to a specific problem, such as a string of burglaries or drug activity. Communities may also have an informal program that develops as neighbors become friends. When an unfamiliar person is lurking about, these neighbors take notice. All neighborhoods benefit from announcing their vigilance with signs posted throughout the area or placed in the windows of homes. Criminals notice when neighbors look out for each other, and they may decide that your neighborhood is not worth the risk of detection.



Remember that your community could also work against you. Those who live near you are in the best position to know your schedule and whether or not you have valuables in your home.

While you can't treat every neighbor



with suspicion, do not provide the temptation or opportunity by announcing trips or vacations to everyone you encounter. Entrust that information only to close neighbors and friends.

Your Home Perimeter

When a criminal looks at your home, what would attract or discourage him from burglarizing it? A well manicured lawn can be quite important in emphasizing that you pay close attention to your home. In the eyes of a burglar, an overgrown lawn suggests a vacancy and possible burglary target. Overgrown or extremely large trees or shrubs can hide burglary activity, especially around your home's entry points. For security's sake have them trimmed or moved. Also trim all tree limbs. The way they hug your home may be artful, but burglars don't see them as art. They view them as ladders! Fences can be an effective part of your security, but they may be a liability in hiding a burglar's activity. Tall, chain link fences provide security without sacrificing visibility. Dogs can also be a valuable asset to homeowners. Any dog that barks at strangers brings unwanted attention to a thief. Larger dogs can even discourage an intruder from entering your yard or home. Streetlights are another important crime deterrent for your neighborhood, but your personal residence should also be well lit. Porch lights and motion-sensitive lighting are recommended for most homes. With a motion-sensitive light, an intruder is bathed in light the instant he steps into your yard. Also consider photoelectric lighting, which automatically switches on at dusk and turns itself off at dawn so that you don't need to constantly turn the porch lights on and off. In addition, low voltage outdoor lighting provides illumination in several areas around your home and yard. Timer on outdoor lamps, radios and televisions create the impression that someone is at home. They can be used to control lamps during the evening and radios and televisions during the day. However, do not set your timers to turn on every light in you home promptly at the same time each night. Burglars are sophisticated enough to recognize this as a sure signal that no one is home. Some timers have a built-in random pattern that slightly varies the daily ON/OFF time and suggests somebody is moving throughout your residence. You do not want to help a burglar break into your home, so watch what you leave in your yard. Be sure to put tools away after you are done. Your own ladders, screwdrivers, hammers or pliers can be used against you.

Home Entry Points

The average burglar has only two options for entering your residence: doors and windows. Examine your entry points and see how well they would stand up to a thief. Doors and windows can be fashionably secured with ornate, yet sturdy, door handles and locks. Quality lock sets can be a good way to add beauty and security.

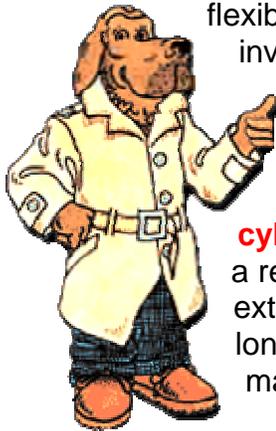
Doors – Doors are an important part of a successful security program. Hollow-core doors are easily kicked in. For external doors and door frames, opt for solid wood or steel. Avoid leaving gaps around the door frame, as this provides leverage for removing the door from its frame. Hinges should be positioned on the inside of the door so that a thief with a screwdriver will be unable to remove the entire door. Sliding glass doors are a common entry point. Many of these doors can be lifted off their tracks. For maximum security, use vertical bolts. Also place a metal or solid wood rod on the inside track to hold the door closed. These measures will help prevent burglars from forcing the door open or lifting it off the track. Garage doors are another frequent entry point. The door that connects your garage to your home should have solid wood or solid-core construction. Secure it with a deadbolt lock. Don't rely on the electric garage door opener as your only security measure. Also, when you are pulling out of your garage, take a few seconds to watch the door close

completely. You do not want a thief to slip under the door before it closes and have easy access to your home. Back doors are a popular target because they are often hidden from the street and many homeowners leave them unlocked. It's important to keep your back door well lighted and install a deadbolt. These doors should have a solid-core as well. If your doors have decorative sidelight panels on the side, beware! Burglars can smash these panels to open the door. If you have sidelight panels, make sure to use a break-resistant material or replace them. A burglar is usually too big to fit through a pet entrance, but children can be bribed to crawl in and open the door for him. Only install pet doors that can be securely locked when you are away from your home.

Locks – When you move into a new house, apartment or condominium, change all of the locks immediately. Because keys have a tendency to multiply, you don't know who will have access to your home if you do not change the locks. Anyone with a moderate amount of skill and desire can pick a common spring-latch lock with a

flexible piece of plastic. As a result, deadbolt locks are a necessary

investment. Doors with single-cylinder deadbolt locks are opened on the outside with a key and on the inside with a turn of the hand. Double-cylinder deadbolts require a key on either side of the door. **If you have windows near your door, install a double-cylinder deadbolt lock because burglars could smash the glass and unlock a single-cylinder deadbolt from the inside.** Look for a deadbolt with a 1" throw and a reinforced strike plate with 3" screws. The extended throw makes it extremely difficult for an intruder to dislodge the lock from the frame. The longer screws attach the strike plate deeply into the framework of the home, making it harder to break into your residence.



Windows – One of the most common entry points for burglars is a ground level window at the rear side of a home. That's why you should use the same security measures on your windows as you would on your doors. Screen on windows do not guarantee the security of the window. While they may slow a burglar's progress, they are easily cut or removed. Window locks are an inexpensive way to keep intruders out. On double-hung windows (which slide up and down), center locks are only effective when the window is completely closed. Locks on the corners or mounted on the sides will allow you to secure windows in a partially open position.

Replace the handle catches on casement windows with keyed locking handles and remove the crank when it is not in use. Keep the key away from the windows, but make sure that it's easily accessible in case of an emergency. Louvered windows, which open outward like awnings, can be very difficult to secure. Consider replacing them with safer double-hung windows. Remember that none of these measures will help you if you leave your doors and windows unlocked. It only takes a few minutes for a thief to rob you of your most valued possessions. Always lock your doors, no matter how soon you plan to return.

Your Possessions

To make your possessions less attractive, more easily identifiable and harder to sell: Engrave an identifying mark (NOT your social security or driver's license number) on valuables. Thieves find it harder to sell marked merchandise. Don't flaunt your belongings. Leave burglars guessing at what they will find and where to find them. The more valuables inside your home, the more persistent burglars tend to be. When you make large purchases, do not leave the empty boxes on the curb. Break them down and place them on the bottom of your trash pile on the day of pickup. You never know what you have until it's gone, so take an inventory of your

possessions now. Don't rely on a panicked memory to give police or insurance agents a description. A written inventory is satisfactory, but other methods of documentation, such as video taping or still photographs, are also effective. Make two copies of your inventory, keeping one copy in your home and another in a safe location outside of the home. It will do you no good if the burglar inadvertently takes the inventory along with him. Should a thief enter your home, he will probably be in a hurry to leave. Chances are he will not take the time to evaluate his loot. If you provide a few decoys, he might not look deeper to discover your real treasures. Keep inexpensive jewelry in the jewelry box on your dresser and put your irreplaceable pearls in a plain paper box. A thief might take the obvious jewelry box and overlook the real one. An inexpensive safe in the master bedroom could serve as a decoy. A burglar will assume that your valuables are inside and probably won't spend time trying to open it in your home. Instead, he'll just take it with him. In case he opens the safe immediately, make him think that he hit the jackpot. Fill it with convincing fake jewelry and important looking papers.

A Secure State of Mind

Be aware of things you might be doing to invite burglars to your home, and start implementing practices that will make your home less attractive to thieves. Do not put notes on your door detailing your schedule. Do not leave messages on your telephone answering machine noting when you will return home. Do not leave repairmen or deliverymen in your home unsupervised. They could easily slip away with your belongings or return later to burglarize your residence. **Take a good look at anybody going door to door in your neighborhood. He could be attempting to determine who is home during certain times of the day. If you and your neighbors gain a clear look at a thief or he senses that persons in the neighborhood are watching, he may decide that committing a burglary is too risky.** Talk to your children about home security. Explain your security precautions and emphasize the role they play in keeping your home secure. Ask them to remember always to lock the door and keep a careful watch on their keys. Show them where the keys to internal locks are located in case they have to exit your home quickly.

